

Rep. Harris Eyes Cleanup of Earleville Dump, Will "Insist" on Monitoring of New Dumping; Harbor Funds Could Aid Project

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By [Nancy Schwerzler](#)

Rep. Andy Harris (R-1) told Cecil County officials Friday that the liner technology proposed to seal a US Army Corps of Engineers dump in Earleville is untested and he will "insist" on monitoring of any new dumping at the site for further pollution of area waterways and wells.

During a meeting in Elkton with the County Council and County Executive, Harris said that "a full liner has never been tested on this scale." He said he would "insist" on ongoing monitoring via test wells drilled in the area to make sure that "the assumptions translate into reality." And, paraphrasing former President Ronald Reagan's comments on arms control, Harris said environmental officials must "trust but verify" that the Corps is not further polluting the area if dumping is resumed.

The Pearce Creek dump, located at the end of Pond Neck Road and adjacent to the Elk River and the Chesapeake Bay, was closed to further deposits of shipping channel dredge spoils 20 years ago due to Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) concerns about pollution of area groundwater. An independent federal study issued last year confirmed that the dump had polluted area groundwater and local residents' wells, including toxic contaminants such as arsenic.

The Corps and the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) want to re-open the site to new dumping but first must obtain a "water quality" permit from MDE. The state agency has already informed the Corps that a full liner over the entire site—not just a partial liner as the Corps originally proposed as a cheaper plan—will be required and that there must be in place a plan for providing safe, clean drinking water for local residents.

The liner would be placed on top of the existing site, apparently to guard against further leakage into groundwater from new dumping, but will not clean up the underlying decades-old dredge spoils that have continued to pollute the area even two decades after new deposits ceased.

County Councilor Diana Broomell (R-4) said she was "very concerned that there is no guarantee with the liner" that it will not "leak."

And Councilor Joyce Bowsbey (R-2), citing costly state and federal mandates imposed on the county under Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) to prevent pollution of the Bay, asked, "if we allow dumping at Pearce Creek," how can the county be "assured" that contaminants won't be leached into the Bay from the site.

Harris conceded there were no guarantees, but that monitoring of the site after renewed dumping will be necessary.

County Executive Tari Moore said that while the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has promised money for a new water supply to pump water from the town of Cecilton to affected local residents, it was uncertain if the Corps would be able to get sufficient federal funds to remediate the pollution at the existing dumpsite.

Harris said that recent legislative changes by Congress should help because a federal Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund will no longer be allowed to be tapped for other unrelated projects. He said the fund, which is financed by fees paid by ships using the Port of Baltimore and other ports around the nation, is designed to help pay for dredging and other maintenance needed to keep shipping channels open to the ports. Since the liner would be part of the effort to dredge the upper Bay shipping channels, it could be financed through the fund, Harris said.

The Corps has not offered any money toward the costs of an initiative by the town of Cecilton to pipe municipal water to the Earleville communities affected by the dump. And the MPA has said it will contribute an unspecified sum, but only if the dump is re-opened to new dredge spoil deposits. The Corps has taken the position that it is only responsible for the dumpsite itself, not any impact it has had on nearby residents.

Moore said the Cecilton water pipeline project will be a "four government level project," including the town, the state, the county and federal governments.

"That's herding a lot of cats," Harris joked.

"But I know the cats," Moore replied.

Last week, Port officials suggested a timeline showing that the agency wanted to resume dumping at Pearce Creek by the fall of 2015, but it could take up to seven years before the water pipeline was finished to serve the affected communities of West View Shores and Bay View Estates. [SEE Cecil Times exclusive report here: <http://ceciltimes.com/2014/01/state-port-agency-sees-up-to-8-years-before-cecil-county-dump-victims-get-safe-water-but-state-wants-to-re-open-earleville-dump-next-year/>]

On other issues, Harris said he would write a letter to the Department of Defense to try to expedite the Navy's taking responsibility for cleaning up pollution at the long-stalled redevelopment of the former Bainbridge naval training center near Port Deposit. But he cautioned that cuts in defense spending under past and recent budget deals in Congress made it "less likely to be funded," especially if an "expensive cleanup" is required.