



## Hueneme dredging plan gets state OK

### \$13 million project to bury contaminants

By Scott Hadly  
shadly@VenturaCountyStar.com  
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A massive dredging project at the Port of Hueneme that had been held up for decades because of sediment contamination was approved Friday by the California Coastal Commission.

The proposed solution is to dig a hole underwater in the harbor, fill it with the contaminated sediment from an area estimated to be about 70 acres of surrounding seafloor, and then cap it with sand and gravel.

"It's designed to be safe for more than 8,000 years," said Anthony Taormina, executive director the Oxnard Port District, which oversees the commercial operations at the Port of Hueneme.

The sediment is contaminated by such things as pesticides, tributyltin and PCBs, but not to a level where they would be considered hazardous materials. Much of the pollution came from sources that were off the base and outside of the harbor, such as an Oxnard sewage treatment plant and urban and agricultural runoff. The tributyltin, or TBT, is likely from anti-fouling paints used in ship building.

It took some time to come up with a way to safely dispose of the polluted sediment, but the port has to be dredged to remain viable, Taormina said.

Similar "confined aquatic disposal" sites have been created at the port in Tacoma, Wash., and in the 1990s in the ports at Long Beach and Los Angeles.

While the \$13 million project will take more than a year of around-the-clock, seven-days-a-week work to complete, it's much cheaper than the alternative of trucking the dredged material to a landfill. One estimate for trucking out debris was about \$32 million.

The district recently completed a mitigated negative declaration on the dredging proposal, in lieu of a full environmental review.

The efficacy of that document, which concludes the environmental impacts of digging up and burying an estimated 327,000 cubic yards of material does not warrant more in-depth study, will be voted on by the Oxnard Harbor District board. An information-only item is on the agenda, which can be viewed at <http://www.portofhueneme.org>. The board's meeting is at 5 p.m. Monday.

Sediment has piled up to depths of 10 to 14 feet in some spots, Taormina said.

"It's critical both for the Navy and the harbor district to ensure harbor operations, and provide the design depths for commercial and Navy vessels to come in and out of the port."

The areas around the Oxnard Harbor District wharfs have not been dredged for almost two decades, while the Navy berths were last dredged in 1965.

The Coastal Commission's approval of the dredging plan came over the objections of the Los Padres chapter of the Sierra Club.

Al Sanders, the conservation chairman for the group, argued the plan should have a more extensive environmental review to look at the potential impacts of the project.

But Navy and Oxnard Harbor District officials argued this was by far the most environmentally sound solution to cleaning up the polluted sediment and clearing the areas where shallow water levels are preventing access to ship traffic.



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## Dredging project boon for port and beaches

Thursday, May 22, 2008

The Oxnard Harbor District (Port of Hueneme) is one of three agencies participating in a harbor-dredging project that will really pay off for local residents.

With the Navy and Army Corps of Engineers, the district plans to undertake a dredging project that will not only restore safe navigation depths for Navy and commercial vessels using our deep-water port, but will also remove and isolate contaminated sediments that have accumulated in the harbor for 50-plus years. Left alone, these contaminated sediments will leak harmful chemicals like PCBs and DDT into local waters

In addition to the cleanup benefits, this project will also result in vital sand replenishment at Hueneme Beach, which provides wave protection to the shoreline as well as clean sand for down-coast beaches between the harbor and Point Mugu. By combining efforts, the three agencies will achieve a 50 percent savings in the final cost compared with completing the work individually.

The Harbor District assumed the lead in the state environmental quality arena. With the Navy and the Corps, we developed a plan to dredge the harbor and bury contaminated sediments from 15 to 40 feet below the harbor floor in a confined aquatic disposal cell. The CAD cell will be in the center of the harbor. Clean sand removed will be placed on Hueneme Beach. All contaminated sediments in the harbor will be put at the bottom of the CAD cell pit and covered with a 10-foot layer of clean sand, keeping sediment secure for more than 8,000 years.

Many options were considered before selecting the CAD solution, including trucking material to a landfill, constructing a disposal area on Navy property, hauling the material to the Los Angeles or Long Beach port for burial in an existing fill site and treating sediments for potential beneficial reuse. Unfortunately, each option either was not feasible or had severe environmental consequences — increased traffic congestion or reduced air quality. The CAD solution possesses greatly reduced impacts to our neighbors and the environment. For impacts we cannot eliminate, we have developed mitigation plans to control them.

This project has other lasting benefits. More than 500,000 cubic yards of clean sand will replenish Hueneme Beach, which is severely eroded. Because of the numerous man-made structures along our coast, such as rock jetties, feeding clean material to the shoreline is a crucial part of maintaining our beaches.

During our public review process, questions have been asked about protecting grunion and pismo clams during the beach disposal phase. We've reviewed and clarified that our protection measures represent "best practices" that will avoid any harm. There was also a question about protection of the groundwater aquifer about 20 feet beneath the proposed bottom of the CAD cell. Our review clarified that our conservative design, together with the impermeable clay layer between 10 and 30 feet thick between the CAD cell and the aquifer, yields excellent protection.

Our plan has been praised by the always-strict Coastal Commission staff, charged with protecting beaches and ocean environment. Staff openly recognized that we examined all options and selected the most environmentally safe option. Multiple conservative design features were added to the project to further ensure its success and reduce the potential for anything to go wrong. May 9, the Coastal Commission unanimously supported the project.

This project will take about a year to complete. Not only will it create no significant problems, it will help solve some significant issues that have plagued the harbor for decades.

We, of the Oxnard Harbor District Port of Hueneme, rightly understand our role as environmental stewards. We are proud to participate in this project.

— Jess Herrera is Oxnard Harbor District president.



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