

May 11, 2000

Palmer Barge Line Site Near Port Arthur, Texas, Proposed to Superfund Priority List

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposes to add the Palmer Barge Line site near Port Arthur, Texas, to the federal Superfund National Priorities List (NPL), EPA and Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) announced today. Metals from former barge cleaning and maintenance operations have migrated and/or could migrate from the facility to Sabine Lake, an active commercial and recreational fishery supporting a number of sensitive environments.

"Adding this site to the Superfund list makes federal dollars available, allowing EPA and the TNRCC to speed their cleanup and meet the agencies' commitment to protecting public health and our environment," EPA Regional Administrator Gregg Cooke said.

TNRCC Chairman Robert J. Huston said, "The TNRCC stands ready to assist the EPA in addressing problem sites such as this one. Continued cooperation between our agencies is essential to clean up all contaminated properties, particularly those which affect the environmentally sensitive areas of our state."

From 1982 until it filed for bankruptcy in 1996, Palmer Barge Line, Inc. operated a marine vessel service and maintenance facility on the 17-acre site located on the Southeast Industrial Islet. For example, Palmer pressure steamed vessel holds, engines and boilers to remove sludges, degreased engines and removed accumulated residues from vessel holds.

The facility's structures include dozens of various-sized steel above ground storage tanks, an oil-water separator, two mixed fuel boilers, two wastewater treatment tanks, several open-top slop tanks, roll-off boxes, and 55-gallon drums.

Analysis of samples by EPA and TNRCC in 1999 established that onsite tanks and soils contained aluminum, antimony, arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, iron, lead, magnesium, mercury, nickel and zinc. The investigations also suggested the presence of pesticides and other organic compounds, including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), pentachlorophenol (PCP), and benzene.

Surface water runoff drains east across the facility to the barge landing where it enters Sabine Lake. Chemical analysis of sediment samples collected from Sabine Lake in 1999 document that aluminum, barium, chromium, cobalt, iron, lead, magnesium, nickel, and zinc have migrated from the Palmer Barge Line facility into the lake.

General information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health is available at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs web page on the Internet at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html>.

Sabine Lake is an estuary that is used as a commercial and recreational fishery. The habitats of four federally-listed endangered species, the bald eagle, black rail, gulf saltmarsh snake, and Texas diamondback terrapin, as well as the state-listed threatened American swallow-tailed kite, are found near the site.

The Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, Sydney Island and Dooms Island bird rookeries, and 13 miles of wetland frontage are located within 15 miles of the Palmer Barge Line site.

The EPA Superfund program works closely with state agencies to clean and restore uncontrolled contaminated properties. Superfund cleans sites when the work required is beyond the resources of state and local agencies.

EPA will seek public comments for 60 days on adding this site to the NPL. Those comments will be addressed before the Agency makes the final decision about adding the site to the NPL. During this public comment period, the Agency will continue to develop cleanup plans so that actual work may begin as quickly after NPL listing as possible.

Send comments by July 10, 2000, to Docket Coordinator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, CERCLA Docket Office (Mail Code 5201 G), Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20460, 703.603.9232.

Comments may also be submitted by express mail. Send original and three copies of comments (no facsimiles or tapes) to Docket Coordinator, Headquarters, U.S. EPA, CERCLA Docket Office, 1235 Jefferson Davis Highway, Crystal Gateway #1, First Floor, Arlington, VA 22202, or by e-mail in ASCII format only to superfund.docket@epa.gov.

Additional information about this site is available on the EPA web site at <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/new/newnpl.htm>.

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For more information contact the Office of External Affairs at (214) 665-2200.