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State Postpones Final Phase of Wrangell Junkyard Site Cleanup

WRANGELL, Alaska — After a series of meetings in the Wrangell area with local government officials, tribal representatives, and the public, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has postponed plans for local disposal of treated soil from the Wrangell Junkyard cleanup project until April 1, 2018, to allow for more time to explore alternative plans and funding.

“The state stepped in last year and worked collaboratively with local officials and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to remove buried batteries, junk cars, and other debris and to treat contaminated soils to remove the risk of the migration of lead to tidelands and neighboring properties. We certainly want to continue to work with the local and tribal governments on the next phase of this project, which is to find a permanent and safe place for the treated soils. This postponement will provide them opportunity to seek project funding to have the treated soil shipped to a disposal facility in the lower 48, rather than disposing of it in an engineered monofill on Wrangell Island, as currently planned,” said John Halverson, a DEC Contaminated Sites manager.

During the site cleanup in 2016, more than four times the originally estimated volume of contaminated soil was excavated, dramatically increasing the total amount of lead contaminated soil to 18,350 cubic yards. Although the treated soil is no longer a threat to neighboring lands or waters and isn’t considered a hazardous waste, it does contain lead and must be managed properly.

“Our current estimate is that it would cost approximately \$12 million to ship and dispose of the soil at a permitted facility in the lower 48,” said Halverson. “We do not have funds in our response and cleanup budget for this, so we had to seek an alternative.” Since the beginning of the cleanup project, the safest and most cost effective alternative was to create a monofill on Wrangell Island on land owned by either the city, borough, or Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). After

working with the City and Borough of Wrangell, EPA, DNR, DEC Solid Waste Program, and engineering consultants contracted for the project, an old rock pit owned by DNR and located on Pat's Lake Road was selected for the monofill site.

The original site of the junkyard was not an option for permanent storage of the treated soil because of the sloped land, weather exposures, residential location, and solid waste regulatory requirements. "From an engineering and regulatory standpoint, the rock pit on DNR land is the best location we could find for the monofill," said Halverson. The site is surrounded and underlain by bedrock, is sheltered from weather, and can be secured and monitored by the state into the future.

Although DEC has explored all of its typically available funding options during the evolution of this project and has not identified funds to pay the higher cost of an out-of-state disposal alternative, the department wants to give the community more time to study the local disposal plan and to seek additional funding for shipping the material out-of-state if the community is not satisfied with the local disposal plan.

If additional funds are not secured, DEC plans to start moving the treated soil to the previously identified monofill location after April 1, 2018. In that case, the department would expect to spend approximately \$5.7 million to build the site, haul the material, and properly cap the monofill. "We plan to finish site preparation work over the coming weeks so the project is ready to move forward in spring 2018 in the event no additional funding is found for this project," said Halverson. "Our goal would then be to move it all to the monofill during the 2018 summer season."

More information and photos of the Wrangell Junkyard cleanup, visit DEC's Contaminated Sites webpage at http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/wrang_junkyard.htm.

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