

November 29, 2004

Lake Cleanup to Be Ordered in Syracuse

By IAN URBINA

State regulators will require Honeywell International to conduct a \$448 million cleanup of Onondaga Lake in Syracuse, one of the nation's most polluted bodies of water, according to people who have seen the plan, which is to be announced today.

The plan, which will be open for public comment until March 1, 2005, requires Honeywell International to conduct extensive dredging of the lake bottom over the next seven years to remove much of the 165,000 pounds of mercury and other toxins that the state says have been dumped in the lake over the past decades. Honeywell is responsible for the cleanup because in 1999 it merged with Allied Chemical, which owned a plant that the state says dumped the toxins in the years before the plant closed in 1988. The state sued Allied Chemical in 1989 for polluting the lake.

Honeywell has suggested a more limited cleanup approach that would cost closer to \$237 million. On the other hand, the Onondaga Indian nation has expressed its concerns that the state's proposed plan is insufficient.

"The nation is deeply concerned that the Department of Environmental Conservation's preferred alternative for the cleanup of the bottom of the lake is not adequate and will leave substantial amounts of dangerous toxins throughout the lake bottom," Joseph J. Heath, a lawyer for the Onondaga nation, wrote in a letter on Wednesday to the commissioner of environmental conservation, Erin M. Crotty. The letter also said that state regulators did not consult with the nation's 14 chiefs about the plan it would propose, as is required by federal law because of the Onondagas' spiritual, historical and archaeological ties to the lake.

"We have had a constructive dialogue with all the interested parties in this effort," said a spokesman for the Department of Environmental Conservation, Michael Fraser. "We met with the Onondaga nation only a week ago and outlined our plans. We feel that that action was consistent with the federal requirements."

Victoria Streitfeld, a spokeswoman for Honeywell International, which is based in Morristown, N.J., said, "The company's proposal submitted in the feasibility study takes into consideration years of scientific and technical analysis and we will continue to refine the plans during D.E.C.'s public comment period." She added, "We are committed to continuing to work with the state to finalize an approach and implement a remedy once the proposed plan is released."

The Onondaga nation, which has about 2,500 remaining members, most of whom live on a reservation roughly eight miles south of Syracuse, have lived near the lake for centuries, Mr. Heath said. The lake is about four and a half miles long and a mile wide.

A federal court ruling in the lawsuit involving the lake's pollution required the Department of Environmental Conservation to announce by today the cleanup plan it will require of Honeywell.

State regulators want Honeywell to dredge up about 2.65 million cubic yards of mercury-contaminated sediments at lake depths ranging up to 30 feet, and to put a cap made mostly of sand and gravel on other contaminated areas of the lake bottom, Mr. Fraser said. Honeywell has proposed dredging 508,000 cubic yards.

Pollution levels in the lake put it on the federal Superfund list of toxic waste sites in 1994.

"The state's plan hardly seems like a permanent solution to the lake's massive pollution problems," said Walter L. T. Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, an environmental research firm.

The cost of a full remediation of the site, which would involve dredging and placing a permanent cap across the entire 2,329 acres of lake bottom, would be about \$2.33 billion, according to department officials.

The state's plan for Onondaga Lake is far less stringent than what federal regulators should require, Mr. Hang said. In the case of the Hudson River cleanup of PCB's, for example, which is being overseen by the United States Environmental Protection Agency rather than state regulators, the most contaminated areas of the river bottom will be completely removed. "Capping is not allowed on the Hudson and should be avoided on Onondaga Lake because it is a Band-Aid approach that will surely fail," he said.

[Copyright 2004 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Back to Top](#)