

No cause for concern with new park

New state DEP regulations have no effect on Weehawken's waterfront recreational area

By Jim Hague
Reporter staff writer

While the state Department of Environmental Protection unveiled a tougher, stricter standard for removing possible chromium contamination from soil in development areas throughout the state, the new standards will have no impact on the ongoing construction of a 16.5 acre waterfront recreational park in Weehawken.

Although the Weehawken site has been listed by the state DEP as one of the 184 areas in Hudson County alone that will be "under review" in accordance to the new state regulations, officials assured that the park is being constructed following the new guidelines, as well as the former ones.

"We're not concerned, not concerned at all," said Weehawken Mayor Richard Turner. "As we've said all along, that site has been remediated in excess of what the DEP standards were at that time. Some people have legitimate concerns and others are raising questions for political reasons, but they're not looking at the whole picture. This site is not like the other contaminated sites in Jersey City. Before any development could have taken place at the site, we had it checked by the DEP, by two or three environmental consultants hired by the developer (Roseland Properties, Inc.) and by our own consultant."

Added Turner, "Everyone has the same concerns, but I believe this site has become a model for Brownfield remediation. The entire waterfront has been remediated at the higher standards. I believe that this is the best remediation plan going."

New DEP standards

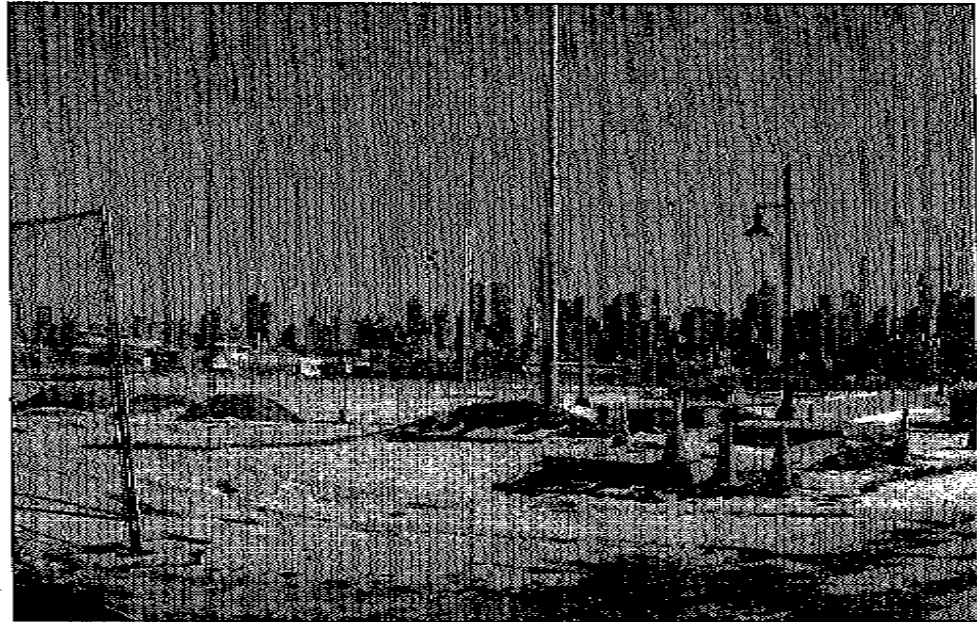
The new DEP standards call for open fields to have no more than 100 parts per million of hexavalent chromium, which is the strictest standard in the country, according to a state DEP release. The old state standard had been 240 parts per million.

Weehawken's Port Imperial development has been under scrutiny because some hexavalent chromium traces were found by a private environmental firm in 2004. The waterfront park is directly adjacent and is being constructed by Roseland Properties, as part of the agreement to build the residential and commercial development along the waterfront.

Hexavalent chromium, a byproduct of industrial processes, is hazardous to humans. Long-term exposure to the compound in the workplace has been associated with lung cancer. Because most of the waterfront land is technically landfill built decades ago, when there were no DEP regulations, the chemicals have been found in the soil at many different waterfront sites from Fort Lee to Bayonne, causing developers to remediate the soil and place protective caps on the sites before developing.

But Michael Campion, the Weehawken township consultant who owns Accutech Environmental in Keyport, says that the new DEP standards apply to residential and school use, not open park space.

"The new regulations do not apply to the park," Campion said. "The standard was 240 parts per million. This land was capped at 100. There are other sites where the chromium was mixed in with the soil. That is not the case for the park. What was there was an acceptable standard for the park. If someone turned around now and used the land for residential



ALL SYSTEMS GO – Despite new regulations regarding chromium contamination established by the state Department of Environmental Protection, the new Weehawken waterfront recreation park continues construction with no cause for concern of not reaching the new state standards.

use, then there might be a concern. But the park is the park, not residential. There's no chromium there. It's actually over achieving the standard. The health and safety of the residents have always been in mind."

Michael Turner, a spokesman for Roseland Properties (and no relation to the mayor) agreed.

"In honesty, the new regulations validates the work that had been done down there," Turner said. "It already currently exceeds the new standard. The state has always maintained the right to review the site. That's why the site appears on the list. We've reached all permit approvals, all DEP approvals in the past. We feel that no further action was necessary."

Parts of park to open soon

Work on the new recreational park continued last week. The entire area has been fitted for electricity, with light fixtures put in place. A scoreboard has been erected near where the multi-purpose field will be built. Some soccer goalposts are in place. While piles of dirt and debris, some as high as 20 feet, remain in sight from Port Imperial Boulevard, there is a Little

League field that has been built and appears almost ready for use.

"Hopefully, by the end of March or the beginning of April, parts of the park will be in use," Mayor Turner said. "We're happy that the plans are moving forward. We're also happy that the DEP has put a regulation into place that fits what we've already done there. Our remediation plan is being acknowledged state wide as a model plan. The list that the park appears on is not a new list. It's reportable, because there was contamination there at one point 12 years ago."

Mayor Turner said that there have been a group of environmental experts from Stevens Tech in Hoboken, from the school's Center of Environmental Systems, that has been monitoring the progress of the contamination remediation and capping.

"We're in constant dialogue with the people at Stevens and with the DEP," Turner said. "In some cases, we've capped and double capped. A third of the park is chromium free already. Another third falls under the new standards. It's a very responsible park and there are no concerns." □