Dump clean-up forces Massachusetts course to close

NEW BEDFORD, Mass. — Part of the city's popular 18-hole golf course will likely be closed to golfers until the year 2000, due to the $12 million clean-up of toxic materials at a former dump, called Sullivan's Ledge, across the road. The clean-up project — to be paid for by 14 companies found responsible for polluting the site from the 1930s to the 1970s — is expected to last about three years.

Many local golfers are frustrated with the idea of the golf course being shut down, off and on, for the next three summers. But state environmental officials and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said contaminants like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and volatile organic compounds like paint thinners or household cleaners pose serious dangers to local wildlife.

Problems could magnify as the pollution moves up the food chain, they said. While there is no direct risk to humans, PCBs are known to cause cancer in laboratory animals.

Sullivan's Ledge, across the road.

The cleanup will be carried out in two phases at two sites — a seven-acre middle marsh area of the course and a 12-acre quarry area across the road. Plans include excavating about 22,000 cubic yards of sediment in the middle marsh and allowing it to dry while treating the marsh water in a new ground-water treatment facility to be built at the site.

The dried sediment would be trucked from the golf course across the street and dumped at the quarry site which will eventually be capped with an impermeable liner spanning about 12 acres and covered with topsoil.

David Lederer, a project manager for the EPA, said PCB levels were as high as 200 parts per million in a marsh on the golf course. The target is to reduce that number to 10 parts per million.

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