Torch Lake PAC Newsletter

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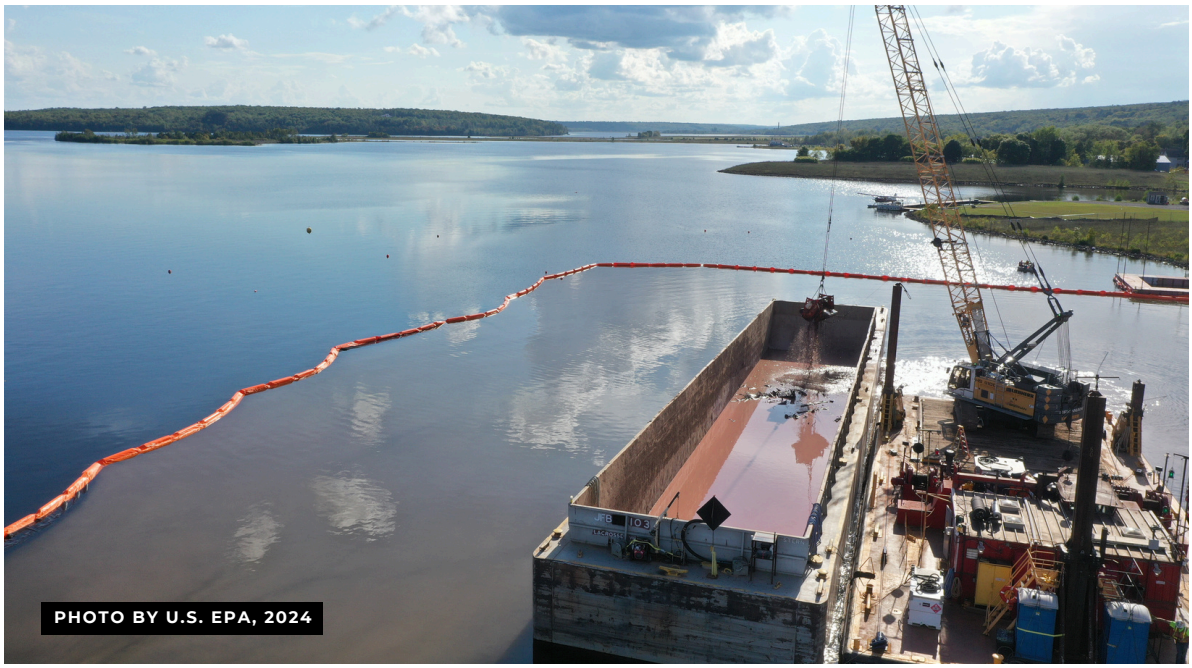

PHOTO BY U.S. EPA, 2024

Drum Pilot Study Update

Last fall USEPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) completed the field work associated with a Drum Removal Pilot Study in the Hubbell Processing Area (HPA) of Torch Lake. The work included removing over 1,150 cubic yards of contaminated sediment along with approximately 100 drums and other debris in three areas within the HPA. This work was performed as part of the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) sediment and drum remediation project as a partnership between GLNPO and Honeywell, in close coordination with EGLE and other community stakeholders, to assist in the evaluation of drum removal and cleanup options at various water depths and is a critical component of the ongoing HPA Feasibility Study.

GLNPO's contractors set up turbidity curtains around two separate work areas prior to removal operations. The turbidity curtains included a bubble curtain system which projects a wall of tiny bubbles through the water column to prevent movement of residuals during dredging. Based on observations during the project it appears the curtains were very successful at containing residuals. Sediment amended with portland cement for stabilization, along with drum fragments and debris, was temporarily staged at the former Mineral Building property in a containment staging area prior to being transported to the landfill for disposal.

Contents

Extensive sediment, turbidity, water monitoring and sample collection was performed during removal by GLNPO's contractors. Evaluation of the data and results continues and will be incorporated into a final report later this spring or early summer. Over 400 drums have been identified on the lakebed of Torch Lake in the HPA at various water depths, ranging from approximately 20 feet to over 60 feet in depth and in various state of deterioration. Results will aid in the selection of a recommended cleanup alternative for the HPA and completion of the Focused Feasibility Study.

In other GLLA news, progress continues on the cleanup for the Lake Linden Recreation Area (LLRA) of Torch Lake. In November 2025, Honeywell submitted a GLLA application to GLNPO for the remediation of the LLRA which includes removal of approximately 11,500 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and placement of a clean sand cover. Development of the Remedial Design continues with final design and permitting are planned through 2025. It is anticipated the cleanup of the Lake Linden Recreation Area sediment will take place in 2026. More information about the cleanup will be shared in upcoming newsletters along with open house events.

Why Honeywell?

While sitting at the Torch Lake PAC table this past August at the Houghton County Fair, we heard a common question: "Why is Honeywell involved with Torch Lake?"

The simple answer is that Honeywell is a successor owner of the C&H properties along the western shore of Torch Lake. These properties have included the remaining buildings and land in Lake Linden, Hubbell, and Tamarack City.

Some background on ownership changes of C&H properties:

Date	Ownership changes of C&H properties
April 1968	Universal Oil Products (UOP) merged with C&H
May 1968	All mine and mineral processing operations shut down due to a United Steelworkers Local 4312 strike. Mining operations never resumed.
May 1974	UOP was acquired by the Signal Companies
July 1982	75 acres of the former C&H Properties (i.e. Mineral Building, Coal Dock, Electrolytic Plant, etc.) are donated to Michigan Technological University
September 1985	Allied Corporation and the Signal Companies merge to form Allied Signal
June 1999	Allied Signal merged with Honeywell to form Honeywell International Inc.

As a successor to C&H, Honeywell is considered a "responsible party" and required to participate in any remediation activities under Superfund law. Honeywell is currently liable for C&H activities even though the Honeywell predecessor (UOP) operated mines and the associated processing facilities only very briefly.

Since 2007, Honeywell has been involved in cleaning up areas in Lake Linden and Hubbell. The Superfund Emergency Response program entered the scene in 2007 to address areas that were left out of the original Superfund remediation of stamp sands. Honeywell reimbursed EPA for removal of contaminated soils near the Lake Linden Beach shoreline.

Subsequently, Honeywell and EPA worked on cleanup and removal actions between 2011 and 2020:

- C&H Power Plant cleanup (2011-2015)
- Houghton County Historical Society Museum cleanup (2016-2017)
- Lake Linden Beach Time Critical Removal Action of sediment in nearshore beach region (Summer 2019)
- C&H Mineral Building in Hubbell - removal of waste piles (2019-2020)

Today Honeywell, in an effort to expedite the cleanup of Torch Lake, is actively working with EPA and EGLE as a volunteer under the Great Lakes Legacy Act to address metals in the Lake Linden offshore sediments and the barrels of waste off of the C&H coal dock.

Summary of 2024 Torch Lake Fisheries Survey Report

The Michigan DNR conducted a survey of fish in Torch and Portage Lakes in 2024. The most recent previous survey in the lake was performed in 2008. The single most important finding from the recent survey was a much lower walleye population (1,000) than was estimated in 2008 (4,000-7,000). The DNR attributed the low estimate to the cold weather during the spawning season, but nonetheless concluded that Torch Lake had far fewer walleye than expected for this size of lake. As was reported in 2008, the recent survey reported a healthy variety of fish species. A total of 16 species were recorded in the recent survey as compared to 18 species in 2008. The single new species reported was the round whitefish.

The DNR further reported that there were no unusual health problems in the fish caught in the 2024 survey. Although a viral infection (lymphocystis in 10-20% of walleye) and parasitic worms (black-spot disease in yellow perch and rock bass) were observed, these are both quite common in area lakes. Neither condition poses any health risk to humans.

A Focus on Stamp Sands (Part 1 of 2)

Property Owners: What to Know about Stamp Sands

Annual Inspections and the Ongoing Efforts

Each year, teams from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), AECOM, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) visit the Keweenaw to conduct annual inspections of the 13 Torch Lake Superfund sites of concern. These inspections help monitor the integrity of the stamp sand cover and point to necessary additional remediation and repair. The teams perform a walkthrough of each site, occasionally using drone footage to get an aerial view of the areas.

If time constraints prevent the inspection of a particular site in a given year, that site is moved to the top of the priority list for the following year. During these visits, the team visually assesses several key factors:

- Signs of significant erosion of the stamp sands
- Sparse vegetation on covered areas
- Failure of erosion protections (such as soil and vegetative covers, and riprap barriers)
- Risk of direct exposure to contaminants in stamp sands

PHOTO BY AECOM, 2020;
SHORELINE EROSION MICHIGAN SMELTER

These observations determine which sites require the most urgent attention within the following year. Repairs might include reinforcement of vegetative covers, additional planting of cover vegetation, or more extensive repairs such as those completed after the 2018 Father's Day Flood. Larger repairs or remediation projects are typically completed over several visits.

Why Erosion Control and Cover?

It's critical to keep the stamp sands in place to protect the environment and ensure that past remediation efforts remain effective. Stamp sands are hazardous materials that, if disturbed, can re-enter the environment, posing additional health risks. Erosion control measures and healthy vegetation cover help keep these sands in place and prevent them from entering nearby water bodies. The integrity of these sites depends on maintaining these protections through annual inspections.

Annual Reports

Once the inspections are complete, the EGLE Superfund office issues a detailed report describing each site with photographs and listing the sites according to their priority for repair work. The report also explains the reasoning behind the prioritization of each site. If you're interested in reviewing these reports, they are available to the public. You can contact us for access to the full report or visit the local document repository at Lake Linden-Hubbell Library, 610 Calumet St., Lake Linden.

Concerns About Relocation of Stamp Sands

One issue that often comes up during inspections is that property owners may have relocated or removed stamp sands during landscaping or construction projects. Some owners may be unaware of land use controls in their deeds that restrict digging into the clean soil and vegetative cover on the sands. If an owner disturbs the soil or cover, they are required to restore it. Disturbance or removal of the soil and vegetation covers is problematic for several reasons:

- It impedes remediation efforts - Moving stamp sands can undo the progress made in keeping them contained and protected.
- Increases health risks - When stamp sands are moved and disturbed, they can release contaminants back into the environment, raising health concerns for residents and wildlife.

If you're a property owner considering any construction on stamp sands or contemplating moving the sands, please reach out to the appropriate agency before taking action. For questions or to discuss plans, you can contact Wally Wagaw (EGLE) by email wagaww@michigan.gov, or calling 517-648-1540, for guidance.

Part 2 of this series will be available in the next issue.

Watch for updates on:

1. Spring/Summer meeting with EPA, Honeywell, and EGLE at Lake Linden High School
2. Exhibit on Torch Lake at the Carnegie Museum in Houghton

Questions? Interested in joining the PAC or receiving email updates?

Contact: Mary Sears at franklintownshipsupervisor@gmail.com

Check out the TLPAC webpage!

Access additional information and updates about Torch Lake by scanning the QR code above to direct you to the webpage or visit the link https://torchlakepac.wordpress.com/