Groups Demand Cleanup Of San Diego Bay

Environmental Groups Say Toxic Contaminated Sediment Endangers People, Wildlife

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By Ed Joyce

San Diego environmental groups are demanding the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board take action on a cleanup plan for San Diego Bay.

San Diego Coastkeeper and the Environmental Health Coalition said lawsuits, studies and other delays have left a toxic chemical soup of contaminated sediment in the Bay primarily from shipyards.

Gabriel Solmer with San Diego Coastkeeper said the pollution harms people and wildlife.

"Heavy metals and all kinds of nasty contaminants that were dumped in the bay over the last few decades that were carried there by the creeks into the bay, and have sat in the sediment are really poisoning our food web, poisoning the fish and up the food chain to people to our wildlife," said Solmer.

Beto Vasquez of Encanto has friends and family living near the polluted bay.

"No where else along the bay, not Ocean Beach, not La Jolla not anywhere else do you see so much industry going on that kind of keeps the community from actually enjoying what it is that's offered there," Vasquez said.

Vasquez said he's also worried about people fishing from piers along the Bay who eat the fish despite signs with posted warnings.

"There's been plenty of times where I have family and friends that go fishing off the local pier," said Vasquez. "But unfortunately you've got to throw the fish back or you just have to get rid of it because sometimes they get some pretty nasty looking fish out of there (in the Bay)."

Laura Hunter with the Environmental Health Coalition said the toxic sediment in the bay is an environmental justice issue.
"Ninety-six percent of the fishers on the piers are people of color, many of them eating the fish, many of them fishing daily and weekly, many of them feeding them to their families," said Hunter. "Corporations should not be able to pollute such a precious resource as San Diego Bay and get away with it."

Hunter said there has been many sediment cleanups in parts of San Diego Bay. She said an initial cleanup order for shipyards was issued six years ago.

"You have very recalcitrant and belligerent polluters at this site, the shipyards, the named parties in the order, and they have employed a very highly expensive, highly controversial process of delay tactics," Hunter said.

Solmer with San Diego Coastkeeper said it has been more than 20 years since the problem of contaminants from shipyards was identified.

But lawsuits and other delays have not produced action to clean up the toxic chemical soup on the bottom of San Diego Bay.

"It should be our birthright that we can swim and fish in San Diego Bay," Solmer said. "It is the jewel of the county and it is an area that we should all be able to enjoy. And that has been stolen from the public by decades of contamination."

Solmer said the Bay is listed under the federal Clean Water Act for 20 separate pollutants including PCBs, copper, mercury and zinc and chlordane.

The groups expect the Regional Water Quality Control Board hearings will result later this year in a board recommendation for a cleanup order for San Diego Bay.

Comments

beachgoer | November 10, 2011 at 8:16 p.m. — 7 months, 3 weeks ago

i read this and felt the need to leave a comment. first let me say that i have lived here my whole life and i'm 50 years old. i have seen a lot of changes to our waterfront areas. i was also at the hearing on 11-9-11. i was there in support of the shipyards since i have worked in the yards all my life, i just wanted your readers to know that the shipyard workers do agree with finally getting to some agreement to get this issue resolved. but please to, sit back and blame the shipyards for all the problems in the bay is completely wrong. there has been run offs and sewage being dumped into our bay for over 100 years, i wish you could actually take a look at how much our work force is in to keeping our bay clean we have over 1300 employees at the yard i work at and we have meetings with all of them 2 times a week just to make sure we continue to keep our best management practices (BMP) at the fore front. we
have storm or rain water collection systems that will not allow any water into San Diego Bay. We have containments to prevent any oils or debris into the bay. If you were to drive past and look at a ship that is being repaired, you would see a plastic enclosure (containment) that starts at the base of the ship to the top of the mast. This to stop any air born debris from entering the bay. Also, I would like to add about fishing on the piers, as you stated people of color are fishing and feeding their families. PLEASE TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT THERE DOING TO THE FISHING THEY DO NOT BELIEVE IN SIZE REQUIREMENTS AND ARE TAKING WAY UNDER SIZED FISH. THEY WILL KEEP A FISH THAT IS NO LONGER THEN 3 INCHES. THIS IS RUINING THE THE FISH POPULATIONS. I SEE THEM THROWING NETS AND CATCHING THE BAIT FISH BY THE BUCKET FULLS. THIS NEEDS TO STOP. thank you

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