



## State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

# Status of the Willamette Cove Cleanup

Contact: [Daniel Hafley](#), Hydrogeologist, DEQ Northwest Region  
700 NE Multnomah Street  
Portland, OR 97232  
[DEQ's Willamette Cover web page](#)

DEQ is working with the Port of Portland, Metro, and others to complete cleanup of historical contamination at the Willamette Cove property. The property is a former industrial site in North Portland along the bank of the Willamette River's Portland Harbor Superfund Site.

## Current status of site cleanup work

The highest levels of contaminated soil were removed from upland areas of the site in 2015-2016. However, chemicals remain in both upland and riverbank soil that pose risk to human health and environment.

Groundwater sampling in 2016-2017 showed the boundaries of contaminated groundwater and provided information for controlling the source of contamination.

On March 7, 2019 Metro and the Port of Portland submitted a revised feasibility study to DEQ that presents options for cleaning up the remaining contamination in the property upland. DEQ is reviewing the document and will identify a preferred cleanup option. Then DEQ, Metro, and the Port will conduct a series of public outreach efforts to get public feedback on an upland cleanup plan.

DEQ will select cleanup actions for the property upland that will protect the Willamette River, and will protect people and animals from exposure to remaining contamination in the upland areas.

Contamination is also present in the riverbank and the sediment of the Willamette River. Cleanup of these areas will occur as part of the larger Portland Harbor Superfund cleanup being managed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

## Potential threats at the property

The public may not access Willamette Cove, due to following threats posed by using it:

- Direct contact with contaminated soils and beach sand.
- Direct contact with physical hazards, including foundation remnants, rebar, and other debris on the site and offshore underwater.



This photo was taken in the Inner Cove area, and shows the site in its current (undeveloped) state under Metro ownership. All site buildings have been removed, and significant revegetation has occurred.

*Photo courtesy of Portland Metro*

- Recreational fishers eating “resident fish” they catch. Resident fish are those that live their entire lives in the harbor and do not migrate out to the ocean or other waters. Resident fish include bass, carp and catfish. Migratory fish like salmon, steelhead and lamprey don’t pose this threat. [Learn more by visiting the OHA’s website.](#)

**Signs posted at Willamette Cove warn that chemical contaminants remain at the site following the 2015-2016 cleanup.** Metro discourages access by keeping the site closed to the public. Oregon Department of State Lands prohibits anchoring at Willamette Cove for more than 30 consecutive nights.

## Background

The Willamette Cove property comprises approximately 27 acres and approximately 3,000 feet of Willamette River shoreline. The low-lying riverfront property is on the Willamette River north of downtown Portland and south of the St. Johns Bridge. Portland’s Cathedral Park neighborhood occupies the terrace above Willamette Cove, while the St. Johns neighborhood is located to the north, and University Park neighborhood to the south.



The photo above shows the site during a period of heavy industrial use.

In the foreground, the Inner Cove area is occupied by a wooden barrel manufacturing operation, with buildings extending over the Willamette River. Further back, Port of Portland drydock operations are seen. In the upper right of the photo, a lumber mill is present on the most downstream portion of the property.

*Photo courtesy of Port of Portland*

Willamette Cove’s industrial uses date back to the early 1900s, including a lumber mill, plywood mill, barrel manufacturer, and dry-dock and ship repair facility. Industrial activities ended by the early 1980s and the site has been undeveloped since then. Metro purchased the property in 1996 and plans to preserve the land primarily as a natural area. Previous industrial activities resulted in soil contamination. The contamination includes heavy metals, diesel fuel, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and dioxins, which pose a risk to human health and the environment. Information on the potential health effects from exposure to these contaminants is available in the [2013 Oregon Health Authority Health Consultation](#).

Metro and the Port of Portland entered into a voluntary agreement with DEQ for oversight of the upland investigation and cleanup. In-water work will occur separately under the EPA.

For more information [visit DEQ’s Environmental Cleanup Site Information database](#) or contact: Daniel Hafley, Hydrogeologist, DEQ Northwest Region, 503-229-5417 [hafley.dan@deq.state.or.us](mailto:hafley.dan@deq.state.or.us)

## Alternative formats

DEQ can provide documents in an alternate format or in a language other than English upon request. Call DEQ at 800-452-4011 or email [deqinfo@deq.state.or.us](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us).