

ALERT: Seattle's Duwamish River Cleanup is Under a Triple Threat

Seattle's Duwamish River was listed as a federal Superfund site – one of the nation's most toxic hazardous waste sites – in 2001. In 2014, after thirteen years of planning and community input, EPA issued its cleanup order for the river. That cleanup is now facing a **triple threat**, as EPA caves to pressure from polluters – the industries and agencies responsible for the pollution and required to pay for cleanup. EPA has proposed three changes to our river's cleanup that increase toxic exposures and health risks to our community and undermine our hard-won river cleanup.

1. EPA proposes to lessen requirements for cleanup of cancer-causing hydrocarbons (cPAHs)

EPA scientists have “reassessed” the toxicity of cPAHs and now think that it is safe for people to be exposed to higher levels than the current standards allow. As a result, the lower Duwamish Waterway Group and EPA proposes to change the Duwamish cleanup plan to allow the cPAH cleanup levels to be 7 times higher.¹ Independent scientists who have reviewed the data do not believe that the evidence of lower toxicity is strong enough to support decisions that increase people's exposure to carcinogenic PAHs.²

2. EPA proposes to allow higher levels of chemicals that threaten human health where the river enters the bay

EPA is preparing to release a cleanup plan for the last leg of the Duwamish, where the river's “East Waterway” (EW) enters Elliott Bay. This plan proposes to weaken cleanup levels by approximately ~15 times for PCBs, 3 times for arsenic, and 5 times for dioxins/furans compared to the 2014 Duwamish Waterway cleanup order for the rest of the river.³ Because the whole river is connected, this undermines the entire river cleanup and directly threatens the health of the river's native and immigrant fishing communities.

The East Waterway's Spokane Street fishing pier is the most popular fishing spot on the entire river for the region's native, immigrant and refugee fishing communities.

Who is responsible for the river cleanup?

The industries and public agencies – the Port of Seattle, King County, City of Seattle – whose actions polluted the river are responsible for cleaning it up. The Port and City of Seattle, King County, and the river's industrial businesses do this work together under the name Lower Duwamish Waterway Group. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for overseeing the cleanup and the Washington State Department of Ecology is responsible for making sure that ongoing sources of pollution are identified and stopped.

Proposed increase in chemicals levels for EW

	PCBs	Arsenic	Dioxins
Current	2	7	2
Proposed	31	20	10
Increase	15times	3times	5times



3. EPA proposes to allow the Jorgensen Forge company to abandon PCBs in the river bottom that it left behind in violation of EPA orders, saving the company millions of dollars

Jorgensen Forge was cleaned up as an Early Action Area because it had some of the river's highest levels of contamination and posed an immediate threat to people's health. The company violated EPA's cleanup orders, leaving behind high levels of PCBs and burying them under backfill before EPA could stop them. The company was fined and a new cleanup order was prepared. Now EPA proposes to allow the company to leave behind much of their mess.⁴

Together, these changes would increase the Duwamish community's exposure to toxic chemicals that EPA's 2014 order promised to clean up. The Duwamish River's communities are **environmental justice** communities – low-income communities of color, including Tribes and diverse immigrant communities who live, work and fish on the Duwamish River. These proposed rollbacks of the Duwamish River cleanup plan violate EPA's environmental justice policies, ignore our local governments' stated commitments to equity, and threaten to further exacerbate pronounced health disparities that have been documented in these communities.

The lack of community consultation and agreement on the proposed changes to the Duwamish River Cleanup Plan disempowers and harms the health of the communities who are directly affected by these decisions. EPA's processes have disempowered the affected communities and the City of Seattle, King County, and Port of Seattle's advocacy for these changes undermines their stated commitments to social and racial equity in the Duwamish River's environmental justice communities. The impact is a stark example of the persistence of **institutional racism** in how our local governments operate and make decisions that harm our EJ communities.

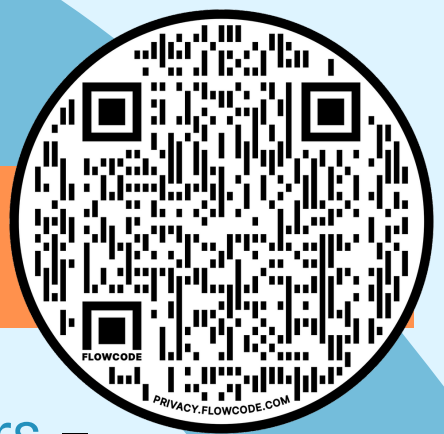
The Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition and its partners are calling on our City, County and Port agencies and elected officials to stand up for environmental justice in the Duwamish Valley by (a) retracting their requests for these changes that undermine the health of our river and our EJ communities and (b) re-committing to implement the 2014 Duwamish River Cleanup Plan.⁵

WE DEMAND:

- (1) full community involvement, consultation and **agreement** to all changes to the river cleanup;
- (2) upholding the commitment to a full, **equitable**, and health protective river cleanup that includes the Lower Duwamish Superfund Site and the Duwamish River's East Waterway; and
- (3) adherence to the requirements of Jorgensen's 2013 cleanup order to require immediate **removal** of all toxic chemicals covered by the original cleanup plan.

How to TAKE ACTION!

- **Call and email** your [City Council](#) and [County Council](#) members and [Port of Seattle Commissioners](#) – tell them to retract the requests for changes to the cleanup and recommit to the original plan. Use the links above to locate the contact information for your elected representatives.
- **Attend** EPA's [Information Session](#) about the new Jorgensen Forge cleanup plan on August 25 at 6 pm and demand that the original cleanup requirements be fully implemented. DRCC will also hold [pre- and post-community meetings](#) on August 23 and September 6.
- **Join DRCC** and advocate for environmental justice and equity for our Duwamish communities! Visit us at www.duwamishcleanup.org and/or email us at contact@duwamishcleanup.org.
- **Sign our petition** at [Change.org](https://www.change.org) or scan the QR code above



1 [Proposed Explanation of Significant Differences, Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site \(January 2021\)](#)

2 [DRCC Fact Sheet on Lower Duwamish ESD; Oregon State University SRP Fact Sheet on Portland Harbor ESD](#)

3 [East Waterway Operable Unit, Technical Memorandum: Final Anthropogenic Background Evaluation \(July 2021\)](#)

4 [Supplemental Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis, Jorgensen Forge Early Action Area \(March 2021\)](#)

5 [Record of Decision: Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site \(November 2014\)](#)