



## EPA delays waste pits cleanup

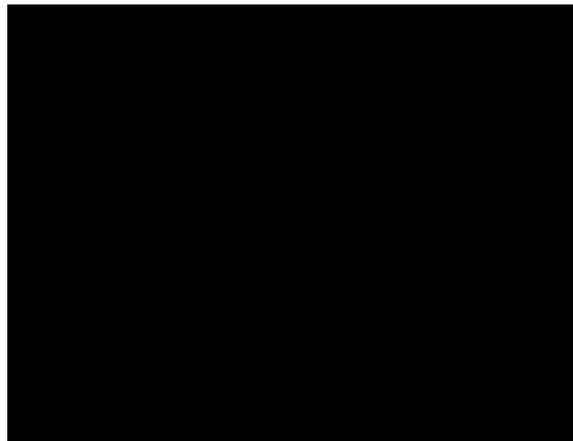
By Mark Fleming

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### ***Time requested to look further into plans***

After more than 10 years of efforts to get toxic waste removed from the riverbed under the San Jacinto River near the Interstate 10 bridge, the Environmental Protection Agency has again extended the deadline for the responsible parties to begin cleanup efforts.

Jackie Young Medcalf, founder of the Texas Health and Environment Alliance, said the responsible parties asked for the extension to allow time for additional sampling for a better understanding of the extent of the waste and to characterize the waste material.



She said the EPA first approved a 160-day extension in September, then approved the additional 270-day extension March 29.

She said, "To the best of our knowledge, adequate sampling has not taken place, and is now one of the reasons this additional extension was authorized. "Why weren't all sampling issues addressed in the past seven months?"

The waste pits, located both north and south of the bridge, contain dioxin, a cancer-causing compound that collects in the fatty tissue of fish and crabs and can then be transmitted to human through seafood.

Paper mill waste containing the material was dumped in riverside pits in the 1960s. Time and subsidence has led to most of the old dumpsite now being submerged, complicating removal.

As a further complication, the revised timeline for a final plan to be submitted combined with time necessary to prepare for removal to begin once the EPA approves the plan means the earliest potential starting date would be in 2024.

The Texas Department of Transportation has set spring of 2025 as a target date to start work on a replacement bridge for Interstate 10, leading to the potential of toxic material being handled just yards away from a major bridge construction project—and construction traffic from both projects clogging what is already a traffic bottleneck.

Medcalf said a meeting is set for this week for the EPA to meet with local officials about the situation.

She held a press conference announcing the delay Thursday in front of the Waste Management building in downtown Houston.

While Waste Management did not operate the original dump site, it now owns a company that was connected to it, making it one of the responsible parties identified by the EPA.

Also identified as a responsible party is International Paper, which eventually bought the paper mill that produced the waste.

