

# Study condemns water at Point

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## Long-term exposure called hazardous

by Joseph M. Giordano

If you swim in the waters around Coke Point, you may want to stop. Immediately, according to a new study commissioned by the Maryland Port Administration [MPA].

The Coke Point Offshore Risk Assessment is evaluating a portion of the Coke Point peninsula as a potential site for a new dredged material containment facility, according to information provided by MPA.

The \$500,000 study, released by consulting firm EA Engineering, found that a lifetime of swimming around or at the Sparrows Point mill area known as Coke Point could make people more susceptible to cancer and other health problems than those who swim in other parts of the Patapsco River.

The study was commissioned by MPA, which is evaluating a 2,300-acre portion of the Coke Point peninsula as a potential site for a new dredged material containment facility.

"Pollution has flowed off the site for decades," said Kim Coble, Maryland Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation last week, "and it is essential that assessments are conducted to determine the risks to human health and the environment."

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) and the Baltimore Waterkeeper filed a lawsuit last July against Severstal and former owners of the Sparrows Point steel plant, according to the Annapolis-based group's website.

The CBF claimed that owners of the Sparrows Point mill have been illegally discharging hazardous waste for decades in the waters around the mill's old coke plant.

The complaint, filed in federal court, sought a full investigation and cleanup of pollution at Coke Point as well as in the environment of Bear Creek and the Patapsco River, the site said.

The complaint charges Severstal, the owner of the Sparrows Point mill at the time, and previous owner ArcelorMittal, with generating, storing, and disposing of hazardous waste at the site without a permit, and continuing to do so in violation of the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and of state laws, their group's website said.

"We applaud the Maryland Port Administration for undertaking this scientifically rigorous analysis in the Coke Point area," Coble said in a statement last week. "But that is only one offshore area of the plant. Now, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Maryland Department of Environment [MDE] should require the current and former owners of the plant to conduct a similar study in Bear Creek."

The Baltimore Waterkeeper joined CBF in the suit.

The Waterkeepers are an international non-profit founded in 1999 by environmental attorney and activist Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., in San Francisco.

Baltimore has had a Waterkeeper group since 2003.

"The surrounding communities have unfairly suffered pollution for years from this site," said Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper Eliza Steinmeier in an email last week. "Studies point to the extensive contamination of the river, yet [the steel companies] have shown no intention of cleaning up their pollution. That is unacceptable. The people own this river and nobody, including the [steel companies], have a right to contaminate our river."

The MDE stressed that the longterm exposure to the waters around Coke Point may cause harm, but that the risk was not immediate.

"We're talking 30 years of water contact, not acute risks," said MDE spokesman Jay Apperson. "People who do not fish, crab, or swim regularly in the waters immediately offshore of Coke Point, the most contaminated area of the Sparrows Point steelmaking property, have no reason to be concerned for their health by the findings of this risk assessment."

- *Next week: What is new mill owner Renco planning to do about the contamination?*