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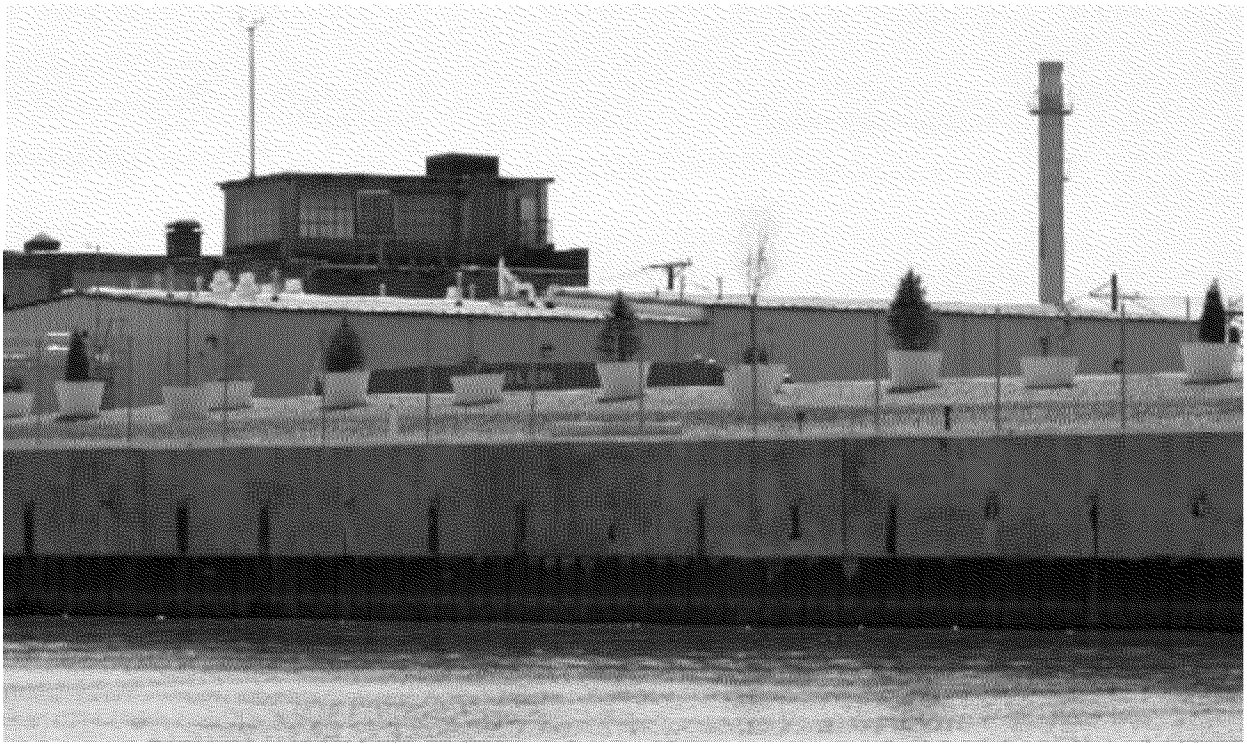
Sent: Fri 1/3/2014 4:31:23 PM
Subject: Opinion piece: Passaic River's best chance at a cleanup: Opinion

http://blog.nj.com/njv_guest_blog/2014/01/passaic_rivers_best_chance_at.html#incart_river_default

Passaic River's best chance at a cleanup: Opinion



Part of the old Diamond Shamrock site in Newark was covered in concrete and made to look like a park after Agent Orange was found to have contaminated the river and part of the shore. *(Tony Kurdzuk/The Star-Ledger)*

By **Star-Ledger Guest Columnist** The Star-Ledger
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By Jonathan Jaffe

The history of sediment contamination in the lower Passaic River in many important ways begins and ends with the illegal dumping of Agent Orange byproducts at the former **Diamond Alkali site on Lister Avenue in Newark**.

Without the dioxin from this facility, the Lower Passaic would resemble many urban waterways — in need of cleanup, but probably not qualifying as one of the most heavily contaminated waterways in the nation.

After taking some limited cleanup action, the parties responsible for this contamination — Tierra Solutions, Maxus Energy Corp. and Occidental Chemical Corp. — have effectively disappeared. They defied an order from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to fund a recent dioxin removal project near Lyndhurst and show no signs of moving forward on additional cleanup action at the Lister Avenue site or anywhere else.

Fortunately, a group of companies unrelated to the Lister Avenue trio has stepped forward and spent tens of millions of dollars to study and better understand the river so that an effective **cleanup solution can be identified**.

This group, known as the Lower Passaic River Cooperating Parties Group, is now completing the removal of contaminated sediment at river mile 10.9, adjacent to a park in Lyndhurst.

After performing and analyzing an extensive study under EPA oversight, the CPG has identified a "Sustainable Remedy" as the best hope for real improvement in the lower Passaic. This remedy would combine surface sediment removal to achieve EPA targets for human health risk with community-based projects designed to reduce risk even further and faster, as well as addressing ongoing sources of river pollution.

It was perplexing to see a few misinformed individuals recently attack one of these community-based projects — a Newark-based aquaponics program. This program is an innovative way to significantly decrease human health risk in the short term, while the river undergoes an extensive, targeted remediation.

A group has identified a "sustainable remedy" as the best hope for real improvement in the lower Passaic.

This one-year pilot program, to be implemented in concert with a large, local church, a leading academic institution and many other local partners, would hire and train unemployed veterans to operate a fish farm and vegetable garden at what is now a vacant building in Newark.

This "closed loop," sustainable system would use waste from the fish raised there to fertilize hydroponic vegetable gardens. Similar to programs the EPA is considering for other rivers, these clean fish would be exchanged for contaminated fish now being caught in the Lower Passaic and eaten.

Consumption of contaminated fish has been identified by the EPA as the leading source of human health risk in the lower Passaic. Besides reducing risk, the aquaponics program would be a healthy food source to areas along the river where it is often lacking.

Contrary to the clearly stated intentions of the Sustainable Remedy, which focuses mostly on an aggressive program to remove contaminated sediment from the river, some have mischaracterized this aquaponics program as a substitute for sediment removal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There is no doubt the lower Passaic needs smart, effective action to remove dioxin-contaminated sediment. It also needs a measured and rational consideration of the kind of holistic approach to restoring the health of the river that is embodied in the Sustainable Remedy.

In order for this improvement to occur, the parties that repeatedly dumped Agent Orange byproducts into the river must be held accountable for the pollution they caused. Once that happens, there will be real hope for implementing the kind of lasting solution that river communities and the CPG have worked toward for so long.

Jonathan Jaffe is a spokesman for the CPG (LowerPassaicCPG.com), comprising companies committed to a cleaner and healthier Lower Passaic.

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