

**From:** Dana <

**Date:** April 22, 2018 at 2:30:48 PM PDT

**To:** "Padilla, Ingrid" <<[brisbanepublicinformation@ci.brisbane.ca.us](mailto:brisbanepublicinformation@ci.brisbane.ca.us)>>

**Subject:** Toxic soil went from SF's Hunters Point to state landfills, ex-workers say

Please enter this information into the Public Record for the Brisbane Baylands:

As a member of the community, I would like the city to put this item on the agenda and have speakers from the Navy, DTSC, Universal Paragon, Recology and GreenAction be present.

## **Toxic soil went from SF's Hunters Point to state landfills, ex-workers say**

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/science/article/Toxic-soil-went-from-SF-s-Hunters-Point-to-12854269.php>

While the Navy has acknowledged the problems with the Tetra Tech work, it continues to insist that the materials were removed from the site properly and safely.

Derek Robinson, who is leading the cleanup for the Navy, said soil is stockpiled on-site and sampled to "to select the appropriate landfill for disposal." Soil that meets both radiological and chemical cleanup requirements is put back into trenches on the site, places where structures may later be built.

Soil that doesn't meet those standards is separated and either sent to a landfill that accepts specific types of contamination in the soil or to a low-level radioactive waste site.

Some batches of dirt hauled off Hunters Point were tested and deemed too "hot" for conventional dumps, meaning they contained unacceptably high levels of radionuclides like cesium 137 and strontium 90 — both can cause cancer. That dirt, at least 4,300 cubic yards, was transported in watertight steel bins to Clive, Utah, one of four disposal sites in the United States licensed to accept low-level radioactive waste.

The rest of the waste, the vast majority, about 7,800 truckloads carrying 156,000 cubic yards, was marked "nonhazardous" and went to conventional dumps.

It was hauled to Kirby Canyon in Morgan Hill, near San Jose. It was transported to Keller Canyon in Pittsburg. It went to a dump in Buttonwillow, near Bakersfield, and to facilities in Vacaville and Brisbane owned by Recology, which collects San Francisco's household trash. Most landfills also have portal monitors, although environmental experts say they are used

sporadically and do not test for radiation. If soil contaminated with radioactive material left the shipyard site without being properly vetted, it is possible it landed in one of these landfills.

The timing of the changes Andrews observed at the portal is consistent with testimony from other whistle-blowers, who say the entire culture of the cleanup changed in early 2011 when Tetra Tech's contract was restructured from "time and material" to a "firm fixed-price model." Suddenly, the contractor had a financial incentive to complete the cleanup as quickly as possible because it was working for a specific dollar amount.

Shortly after that contract change, worker and whistle-blower Bert Bowers, who was in charge of monitoring compliance with Nuclear Regulatory Commission standards, said he started to see violations of industry standards — equipment left where it shouldn't be and employees working without proper oversight. He complained and was later fired.

"The incentive was there to cut corners and get bonuses, and I started to see the effect," he said. "The standards started to become compromised."

Anthony Smith, who worked as laborer and technician at the shipyard during that time, said he and his colleagues spent months taking soil from areas known to be clean — like the foundation of an old movie theater — and passing it off as coming from sections of the site known to be highly toxic.

"It came down from the higher-ups — 'We're gonna make this clean today. Go get a sample from the normal place, go get a clean sample,'" Smith said.

Lindsey Dillon, a professor of sociology at UC Santa Cruz who is writing a book about the cleanup and redevelopment of the shipyard, said it's ironic that the champions of the redevelopment project cast it as "the heroic story of cleaning up a toxic military base" while the waste taken off the property is "creating a new geography of toxic exposure."

Conventional landfills tend to be located in communities lacking economic or political clout.

"It's a systemic issue, because these landfill sites are located in particularly vulnerable areas," said Dillon.

Don Wadsworth, a health physicist who specializes in radiation safety and radioactive waste management services, said the classified nature of Hunters Point's history makes it hard to know what is buried on the property. But the federal government allocated plenty of money to do the job correctly.

"The problem you have is that Tetra Tech was on a program of deceiving the client and the regulators about the conditions on the site and the conditions of the materials leaving the site," said Wadsworth. "In this case, the safety guard rails were not only ignored, they were ripped up and thrown away."

Daniel Hirsch, retired director of the Environmental and Nuclear Policy Program at UC Santa Cruz, said the "release criteria" governing waste materials the Navy set at the shipyard were far lower than they should have been. And it is problematic that those standards may have been violated.

Hirsch said he has spent two years trying to find out what happened to the materials removed from the shipyard.

"The Navy have resisted and resisted and resisted," he said. "My impression is that they knew this was a potential problem and didn't want it exposed."

Landfills sell material as well as accept it so it's tough to say where all material from the shipyard wound up. Hunters Point soil could have ended up in rural roads, parks or building sites, Hirsch said. It could have been used as "cover" at landfills and ended up blown into nearby neighborhoods. It could contaminate water tables and irrigation used for crops.

In addition, waste and unwanted furnishings and metals such as pipes salvaged from razed buildings on the site could be recycled. Contaminated office furniture, fencing, metals and concrete from buildings all could have ended up in places where they could do harm to an unsuspecting public.

"I predict those communities will be up in arms, and they should be," Hirsch said. "They have converted one Superfund site into perhaps many."

Several of the waste removal and recycling companies that received soil and debris from the shipyard did not return calls.

Recology, which owns facilities in Vacaville and Brisbane, said it would review all shipments from Hunters Point. Spokesman Eric Potashner said his facilities require customers to sign a guarantee that the soil doesn't contain contaminants that are not accepted, which would include anything radioactive.

"We have a robust sampling and acceptance criteria for all waste that comes into the site," he said.

Andrews, who is from West Virginia, said Tetra Tech should be responsible for conducting tests at the landfills where the shipyard soil ended up. She said that her co-workers went along with the program because the Hunters Point jobs were the most lucrative in the country for workers in the hazardous waste remediation field. They paid \$42 an hour plus \$1,500 a week in expenses. Most of the workers were from Southern states where that kind of money goes a long way.

"I was told to shut my mouth, that I didn't live there, had hit the lottery, that I should shut up and save my money. The more they said that, the madder I got," she said. "I did care, and I decided that the people of San Francisco were worth more than my salary."

*J.K. Dineen is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer.*

*Email: [jdineen@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jdineen@sfchronicle.com) Twitter: [@sfjdkineen](https://twitter.com/sfjdkineen)*