



April 10, 2017

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Kerry Graber  
Site Manager, Washington State Department of Ecology  
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Re: Occidental Chemical Corporation – Draft Feasibility Study

Dear Ms. Graber:

Thank you for providing the Tacoma Waterfront Association the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Feasibility Study (FS) for the Occidental Chemical Corporation Superfund site in Tacoma, Washington.

Formed in 2006, the Tacoma Waterfront Association (TWA) is a 501(c)4 non-profit organization that unites a dynamic waterfront community to educate, promote and provide leadership on issues important to Tacoma's unique 46 miles of Puget Sound shoreline. TWA has grown to represent more than 100 business, non-profit groups and residents from Brown's Point to Point Defiance interested in preserving, promoting and improving Tacoma's unique waterfront.

Part of what makes Tacoma so special is its history of overcoming a legacy of toxic contamination and polluted waterways and becoming a community re-establishing its vital connection to its waters. Tacoma's waterfront, including the Hylebos Waterway, is a source of pride and identity for both TWA and the broader Tacoma community and it deserves a solid and thorough cleanup plan.

TWA members have reviewed the draft Feasibility Study. Our concerns and comments are outlined below.

### **Background**

The contamination from Occidental Chemical, formerly Hooker Chemical, is staggering. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of toxic, cancer-causing chemicals are spread underneath the site, the Hylebos Waterway, and potentially Commencement Bay. The pollution is so potent that it dissolves rock into jelly.

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## **Comprehensive and Timely Cleanup**

### *Comprehensive Cleanup*

The Occidental Chemical Corporation is setting the stage to walk away from this toxic mess without a comprehensive cleanup. Attempting to cut costs, Occidental is proposing a cleanup plan that would leave nearly two-thirds of their pollution in the ground – highly toxic pollution right underneath a vulnerable aquatic ecosystem.

This is unacceptable – this is not acceptable for the members of the Tacoma Waterfront Association, for the Tacoma community nor for our environment. Tacoma deserves better.

Due to the extent of the contamination at this site, the FS discounts the removal of tens of thousands of pounds of contaminants because it will not have an impact on the total amount there. Further, the disproportionate Cost Analysis provides a misleading look at the remedial alternatives. The FS did not combine alternatives trying to find the best combination of actions. Instead, what could be components of a complete remedy are examined separately. No remedial alternative presented in the FS provides for a comprehensive cleanup of the Oxy site and no alternative presented examines the removal of contaminants under the Hylebos Waterway.

TWA finds that the FS did not follow the Model Toxics Control Act in that it did not consider treatment to the “maximum extent practicable.” This must be remedied in the final draft of the FS and in Ecology’s final cleanup decision.

### *Timely Cleanup*

It is imperative that Occidental is held accountable for a timely cleanup. The cleanup should be in two phases – in phase one, Occidental must remove as much contamination as possible and they should immediately be required to research how to remove the high pH plume.

Phase two should include sediment and porewater sampling under Commencement Bay to determine whether the site has impacted the Bay and to ensure the plume does not daylight somewhere. Phase two must also include further research and development of technology of pH treatment to allow pump-and-treat where pH currently precludes groundwater extraction. The selected remedy needs to include the requirement that it be looked at with reasonable frequency, and when possible, additional actions need to be implemented.

## **Risk Concerns**

The TWA is concerned about the following risks: 1) risk of landslide/slumping; 2) risk of earthquake; 3) risk of contamination entering the water; and 4) the risk of ignoring sodium hydroxide.

The Tacoma Tideflats are uniquely at risk for catastrophic geologic processes, such as landslides and earthquakes. The real potential for these events carry serious consequences for containment of the Occidental contamination plume. While current studies indicate that contaminants do not release into the Hylebos, there is minimal information on whether they enter Commencement Bay. These contaminants are toxic to aquatic wildlife should they enter the water. Lastly, the groundwater under the site is also contaminated with sodium hydroxide (caustic soda), which is so alkaline that it’s

stronger than drain cleaner. Due to the extent and complicated nature of the sodium hydroxide contamination, Occidental is essentially ignoring it in their cleanup options. They merely propose to build a wall to try to contain high pH chemicals. Containment alone cannot be the final solution for this material.

### **Ensuring Adequate Cleanup Funds**

We cannot afford to let the Occidental Chemical Corporation walk away from their toxic mess – they must be held accountable for the strongest and quickest cleanup possible. Further, Occidental must create a performance bond, reserve account or equivalent fund to ensure that cleanup costs will be covered regardless of the company's future financial status. Ecology must explain what the financial assurance will be for this site since Occidental is required to operate their system far into the future.

### **Conclusion**

The Tacoma Waterfront Association knows firsthand just how important putting together an adequate cleanup plan for Superfund sites is for our environment, our economy and our community.

Ecology needs to hold Occidental fully accountable for a comprehensive and timely cleanup to the "maximum extent practicable" as required by the Model Toxics Control Act. Occidental's preferred remedy is unacceptable. Additionally, we mustn't allow the profits of polluters to outweigh the importance of environmental protection.

Please contact me if there are questions regarding our comments. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback for the draft Feasibility Study. We look forward to a sound and timely cleanup of the Occidental Chemical site.

Sincerely,

Scott Knox  
Board President, Tacoma Waterfront Association