

COMMUNITIES AND THE WILLAMETTE RIVER SUPERFUND SITE:

*The intersections of public health,
environmental justice, and ecosystem
restoration*

Sterling Stokes
Portland Harbor Community Coalition (PHCC)
OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
sterling@phccoalition.org



Agenda

- **What we know**
- **Portland Harbor Superfund site**
- **Vulnerable populations**
- **Community impacts (preceding the earthquake)**
- **Community impacts (following the earthquake)**
- **What's missing**
- **Moving forward**
- **General recommendations**



What we know

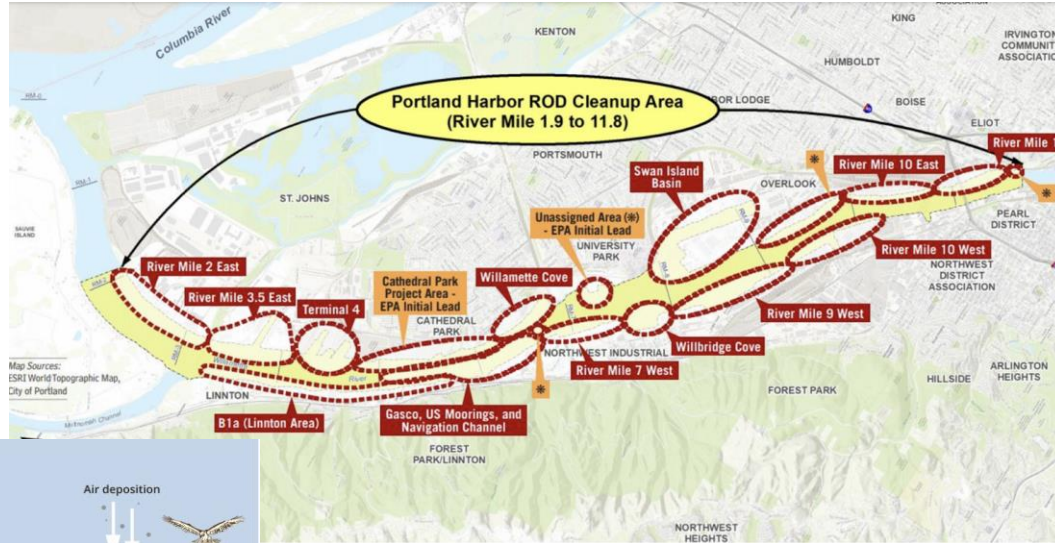
- **Unprepared for Cascadia 9.0 earthquake**
- **Not on track towards Oregon's Clean Energy targets**
- **Willamette River Superfund site cleanup**
 - 2026 estimated start date
 - 13-30 year timeline
 - \$1-3 billion



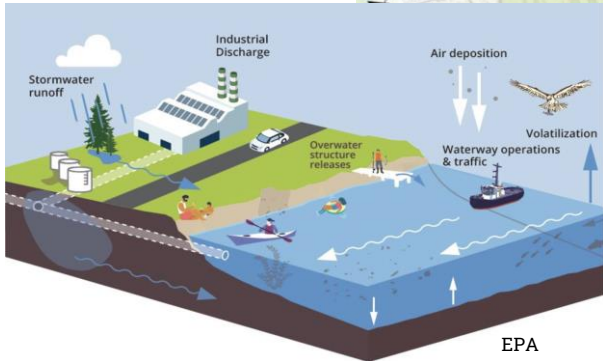
Portland Harbor Superfund site



Cedar Action



EPA



EPA



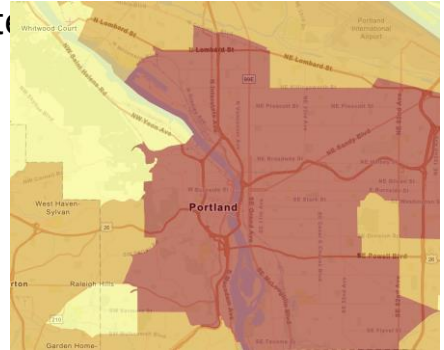
Vulnerable populations

- **Low-income**
- **People of color**
- **Women**
- **Elderly**
- **Children**
- **Home renters**
- **Flammable roof, vegetation within 10 meters of home**
- **Language ability/linguistic isolation**
- **Isolation or fear of public agencies**
- **Geographic isolation**
- **No health insurance**
- **No vehicle**
- **Living with a disability**
- **Institutionalized**



Community impacts (preceding the earthquake)

- **Toxic exposure(s) in/ around the Superfund site due to industrial activity**
 - Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, (PAHs), dioxins/furans, pesticides, and heavy metals in the soil, air, and water
 - Industrial area (EJScreen: diesel PM, air toxics cancer risk)
 - Health impacts and cumulative risks (e.g. living and fishing)
- **Environmental justice and ecosystem degradation**
 - Salmon runs and lamprey eel populations declining and toxic
 - Tribal Treaty rights
- **EPA's Community Impacts and Mitigation Plan (CIMP)**
 - Performance measures to protect communities and ecosystems during cleanup
 - Consent decree
 - Restoration and secure community benefit agreements (CBAs)



Community impacts (following the earthquake)

- **Severe outcomes for different communities**
 - **Surrounding the river:** high air, soil, and water toxic release
 - Housed and houseless populations
 - Employees
 - **East Portland:** toxic plume
 - African Americans and Hispanic populations and children in schools
 - Exposures to PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ already surpass safety (daily is 35 micrograms/cubic meter)
 - An earthquake-induced toxic plume would be near 300-500 micrograms per cubic meter
 - **Downstream:** contaminated food sources
 - Tribes
 - **Lane County:** upstream dam failure
 - Eugene flooding
 - **River health**
 - Ecosystems, species
- **Portland Harbor Superfund site cleanup**



What's missing

- **General community feedback and involvement specifically for vulnerabilities to prepare for the disaster**
 - *Examples from PHCC:* concerns about cumulative risks, lack of preparedness, species impacts, etc.
 - More is needed to adequately serve and support community members
- **SB1567's mitigation rules are facility-specific and lack direction for**
 - Preventing harm to the Willamette River and ecosystem species
 - Mitigating impacts for the Portland Harbor Superfund site and considering the cleanup timeline
 - Increasing community involvement, preparedness, and resilience through mitigating risk(s)



Moving forward

- Direct community engagement and participation to reduce risks of the aforementioned threats and vulnerabilities
- Better modeling data (designed and conducted with community) to understand community impacts and if there are unknown vulnerabilities
- Develop funding to secure resource needs and preparedness based on modeling findings
- **Build on SB1567's mitigation rules to incorporate a shorter-timeline, community-based mitigation framework through new legislation**



General recommendations

On behalf of individuals, communities, and species disproportionately (historically, presently, or predicted to be) impacted by the Portland Harbor Superfund site and the Cascadia 9.0 Earthquake, we strongly urge state leadership to listen, incorporate, and center these voices to develop more comprehensive and applicable disaster resilience and planning efforts by mitigating vulnerability risks.

What would this look like? *There isn't a direct answer, but moving towards one required efforts to be determined and designed with impacted communities.*

sterling@phccoalition.org

