

Golden Gate Bridge

A Landmark Poisoned

Why has the Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District (“the District”) spent millions of dollars testing the soils for lead contamination and cleaning up lead contamination around the Golden Gate Bridge, only to then repeat the behavior which helped cause the contamination in the first place, namely, blasting off lead-bearing paint without containing the scrapings and allowing them to land on the same soil and waterways? The District has known of environmental contamination at both the north and south approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge since 1992. As of 1999, approximately 6.5 million dollars had been spent in studies and remediation efforts. Since 1999, estimates of the liability for the remediation of continuing lead contamination has grown to 13.8 million dollars as of July 1, 2008.¹

According to a Department of Toxic Substances Control’s (DTSC) report on the Golden Gate Bridge Lead Cleanup Site Project Update, “the goal of Phase 1 lead cleanup process was to make the Site environmentally safe,” with the removal of 40,000 tons of lead-bearing sand blast material, to “achieve a safe environment for human activity.”² This environmental cleanup effort is great, except for the fact some of the same areas have likely been re-contaminated. This means the studies and remediation efforts have to start again and more of your toll, bus and ferry dollars are being spent to fix the same problem!

Speaking of studies, in 2010 the District entered into an agreement and budgeted \$980,057 (with a contingency fund of \$98,000)³ for a sampling study by a company called EKI, Inc. As it turned out, the DTSC determined that the EKI report needed to be revised to include an “increased number of samples and sample locations,” and that the revised sampling plan “does not present clearly defined objectives, and lacks an evaluation of how those objectives will be achieved.” The DTSC also suggested EKI consult the EPA’s industry guide for developing field sampling plans to reach defensible decisions or make credible estimates. “A more complete field sampling plan which includes a broader range of objectives may significantly reduce the amount of work required in the future.”⁴

This makes a person question what the credentials of EKI were that they were selected as the best company (out of the seven RFPs that were received) to do the study.³ It makes a person wonder how EKI was vetted. The June 25, 2010 service agreement with EKI was signed by the District Secretary Janet Tarantino. It should be noted that EKI lists a Stephen Tarantino as V.P. of Civil Engineering and Jeff Tarantino as V.P. of Finance and Administration. An inefficient study at a cost of approximately 1 million dollars is another example of GoldenGateWaste and general mismanagement. This study, if done correctly, could possibly have reduced the overall amount of work that needed to be done.

Kary Witt, the Bridge Manager whom the District proclaims as the person “responsible for the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the world famous Golden Gate Bridge,”⁵ did not prevent the District’s own painters from conduct likely to re-contaminate the soil and waterways, not to mention health risks to the community. The District’s inadequately trained painters have been recorded dumping sand blast material directly into the environment from the North Approach Viaduct project.⁶ This is the same kind of sand blast material which was found in the approximately 40,000 tons of lead-bearing sand blast material and soil that was removed during the Phase I cleanup.² Bridge Manager Kary Witt addressed these actions of contamination by his painters in an Interoffice Memorandum⁷, but one would think these employees already knew or should have known that dumping lead-bearing sand blast material off the side of the bridge was cause for discharge. Yet no one was fired nor apparently even suspended. Private industrial painting contractors would never tolerate this behavior.

Currently, work being performed by the Golden Gate Bridge painters on the Main Cable Renovation and Repaint Project (MCRRP) is adding to the contamination. This work is being performed above the same main deck you would take a bike ride or take a stroll with your family; while the painters above are chipping and grinding lead-bearing paint that you can look down on the sidewalk and see the paint chips, some as large as your fingernail, as you walked along. Vantagepoint Consulting was hired to ensure compliance on the MCRRP project. Their report states, “Albeit, some visible paint debris was observed on the sidewalk below the work areas which locations should be policed on a daily basis and any residues removed.”⁸ Our independent observations on several occasions found paint chips present long after the painters had left. These are the same painters which are being paid significantly more than highly-trained and certified private industrial painters. Just another example of your toll, bus and ferry dollars going to GoldenGateWaste.

The Golden Gate Bridge needs a keeper, if Bridge Manager Kary Witt can’t or won’t do it, if the District can’t or won’t do it, then it is up to us concerned citizens, the public, the community and the many visitors who come from all over the world to visit the Golden Gate Bridge and expect to be able to do so in a safe environment free from contamination to make our voices heard. Tell the District to, “Stop GoldenGateWaste, enough is enough!” and post your opinion here on the GoldenGateWaste website.

Please continue to visit goldengatewaste.org for weekly updates on the wasteful practices and mismanagement by Kary Witt and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District.

Resources:

¹ Comprehensive Annual Financial Report For The Fiscal Years Ended June 30, 2011 and 2010 Golden Gate Bridge , Highway and Transportation District, San Francisco, CA

² Department of Toxic Substances Control, Fact Sheet, October 2008

³Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District Resolution No. 2101-052, Approve Actions Relative to the Execution of a Professional Services Agreement with Erler & Kalinowski, Inc., Regarding Request for Proposals No. 2010-B-2, Lead Cleanup Phase II Feasibility Study, Remedial Action Plan and Construction Drawings for Golden Gate Bridge North and South Approaches, dated June 25, 2010

⁴Department of Toxic Substances Control Review of the “Sampling Plan Addendum for Phase II Lead Cleanup, Supplemental Shallows Soil Sampling at the North and South Approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge”, Erler & Kalinowski, Inc., May 12, 2011., and Review of the “Revised Plan Addendum for Phase II Lead Cleanup, Supplemental Shallow Soil Sampling at the North and South Approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge”, Erler & Kalinowski, Inc., May 18, 2011

⁵ Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District Employee Handbook

⁶ Eyewitness statement that on October 4, 2011 they see “sand being poured or dropped” off the northwest tower dated October 28, 2011.

⁷ Interoffice Memorandum from Kary Witt dated October 17,2011

⁸ Vantagepoint Consulting Re: Results of Air Monitoring for Exposures to Lead During Lead Wool and Oakum Removal on the West Main Cable between Saddles 115 to 119 on November 28, 2011, Project #VP-11-08 dated December 6,2011