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(New York, N.Y.) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced an agreement with six entities to begin the first phase of the Superfund cleanup of Newtown Creek in New York City. The agreement includes an investigation of the contamination in Newtown Creek and a study that will outline options to clean up the contamination. EPA added Newtown Creek to its Superfund National Priorities List of the country's most hazardous waste sites in September 2010 because its water and an estimated 1 million cubic yards of its sediment contain a range of contaminants such as pesticides, heavy metals, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

"Newtown Creek is one of the most polluted urban water bodies in the country, and EPA is committed to making sure this waterway receives a thorough cleanup," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck. "This agreement is an important step that will provide a comprehensive study of the contamination in Newtown Creek and the development of options to clean it up. The agreement also ensures that the parties responsible for the pollution, not the taxpayer, will foot the bill."

Under the agreement, six parties responsible for cleaning up the contamination in Newtown Creek – the Phelps Dodge Refining Corporation, Texaco, Inc., BP Products North America, Inc., National Grid NY (formerly the Brooklyn Union Gas Company), ExxonMobil Oil Corporation and the City of New York – will conduct the investigation and study under EPA's oversight. The agreement also requires that these six parties pay EPA $750,000 for the agency's previous work at Newtown Creek and reimburse the agency for oversight costs for both the investigation and the study. EPA anticipates that it will identify additional parties responsible for the contamination in Newtown Creek.

The six parties that signed today's agreement have already completed an EPA-approved work plan for the investigation to determine the nature and extent of the contamination in Newtown Creek. The investigation will begin later this summer, beginning with an analysis of contamination in Newtown Creek's sediment, surface water and surrounding air. The remedial investigation will take several years to complete, after which EPA will oversee an analysis to develop and assess the full range of options for cleaning up contamination in Newtown Creek.

An important part of the Superfund cleanup process is regularly updating and involving the community near a site. Later this summer, EPA will hold a meeting to

discuss the Superfund process with the Brooklyn and Queens communities that border Newtown Creek and begin developing a community advisory group, which is designed to serve as the focal point for the exchange of information among the local community and EPA.

Newtown Creek is part of the core area of the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary, which has been designated by EPA as an “estuary of national significance.” In the mid -1800s, the area adjacent to the 3.8-mile Newtown Creek was one of the busiest hubs of industrial activity in New York City. Numerous industrial facilities were located along its banks, including more than 50 oil refineries, as well as petrochemical plants, fertilizer and glue factories, sawmills, and lumber and coal yards. The creek was crowded with commercial vessels, including large boats bringing in raw materials and fuel and taking out oil, chemicals and metals. In addition to the industrial pollution that resulted from all of this activity, the city began dumping raw sewage directly into the water in 1856. During World War II, the creek was one of the busiest ports in the nation. Some factories and facilities still operate along it, and various adjacent contaminated sites have contributed to its contamination. Today, as a result of its industrial history, including countless spills, Newtown Creek is badly polluted.

For more information on Newtown Creek, visit http://www.epa.gov/region02/superfund/npl/newtowncreek/ [1].

For downloadable, broadcast-quality b-roll video of Newtown Creek, visit http://www.epa.gov/region02/mediacenter/stockfootage.html [2].

For a Google Earth aerial view of the Newtown Creek site: http://www.epa.gov/region2/kml/newtown_creek.kml [3]. (Please note that you must have Google Earth installed on your computer to view the map. To download Google Earth, visit http://earth.google.com/download-earth.html [4]).

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