

BostInno

Nick DeLuca | February 10, 2015

Snow Dumped in Boston Harbor as Last Resort



Because Boston's snow farms are steadily reaching capacity and it's been difficult for city crews to melt the snow at a rate faster than it accumulates, there's been talks of dumping snow in Boston Harbor. The city and state have worked tirelessly to clean up that dirt water everybody loves so dear, so would the snow pose a treat to those efforts?

The impact would hardly be noticeable, if at all.

Notion of a snow dump are not considered without reservation because of everything the snow potentially carries with it. Crews and plows not only gather the accumulated fluff, but items like trash, oils and other contaminants catch in the snow.

But George Bachrach, president of the Environmental League of Massachusetts, isn't worried about an adverse impact on Mother Earth mostly because he realizes that Mother Nature has left us without many other options.

"Dumping snow into Boston Harbor should only be a last resort," Bachrach told

BostInno. "However, we may have reached that point, with no other alternatives. Clearing the streets and public safety is always the highest priority."

Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and Governor Charlie Baker have both made it abundantly clear that at this point, with the brunt of the snowfall behind us, the largest problem facing municipalities and the state isn't the snow removal; it's where to put it all.

But that's not to say there's no environmental risk involved. Which is why Bachrach, the mayor and the governor are only considering this an option should there be no other.

"It is a last resort option that we do not think we will need to use at this point," Bonnie McGilpin, press secretary for Mayor Walsh, told Boston.com agreeing with Bachrach.

Save the Harbor / Save the Bay, a nonprofit advocacy group dedicated to protecting Boston Harbor since 1986, is also on board with utilizing Boston Harbor for snow replacement.

"The extreme snow falls we have faced over the past few weeks has certainly created extraordinary conditions," said spokesperson Bruce Berman. "We believe that the Mayor and City officials are right to put the public's safety first, and support their decision to consider dumping snow into the harbor as a last resort."

Save the Harbor contends that because much of the inner harbor reaches depths of about 40 feet and experiences a large tidal flow, the environmental consequences would not be severe and would be limited overall.

In order for cities and towns to be granted permission to dump snow in Boston Harbor, they must first appeal to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Among other steps in the process, communities must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Dispose of snow in open water with adequate flow and mixing to prevent ice dams from forming.
- Do not dispose of snow in saltmarshes, vegetated wetlands, certified vernal pools, shellfish beds, mudflats, drinking water reservoirs and their tributaries, Zone IIs or IWPA's of public water supply wells, Outstanding Resource Waters, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.
- Do not dispose of snow where trucks may cause shoreline damage or erosion.
- Consult with the municipal Conservation Commission to ensure that snow disposal in open water complies with local ordinances and bylaws.