

# East Boston Times-Free Press

John Lynds | February 12, 2015

## Snow Dumped in Boston Harbor as Last Resort

The Walsh Administration said Tuesday it would only dump snow in the Boston Harbor off the shores of the city as a last resort.

“Two of Boston’s snow farms were melted last night and the City has the capacity to haul snow from the neighborhoods to both snow farms for the next 4-5 nights,” said Mayor Martin Walsh’s press secretary Bonnie McGilpin. “The City is looking at putting snow in the harbor but it is a last resort right now.”

Dumping snow into the harbor was a common practice prior to 1997 but the Mass Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) nixed the practice citing environmental concerns due to the mix of pollutants that gets mixed up in plowed snow—especially given the rebound of the Boston Harbor’s cleanliness in the previous years.

However, the EPA said in a statement “due to the extraordinary weather experienced by the Commonwealth in the past several weeks, municipalities throughout the Commonwealth are facing significant challenges in their efforts clear, remove and dispose of historic accumulations of snow. MassDEP recognizes that cities and towns may need to undertake emergency measures to ensure protection of public safety.”

As Boston proceed with necessary emergency snow disposal, the DEP recommends that officials use the best management guidelines included in the DEP’s Emergency Disposal Guidance. These include:

- 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 IW-PAs 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.

Bruce Berman of Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, the state’s watchdog group for environmental issues along the coast said dumping snow into the Harbor should be, “As a last resort in extraordinary circumstances in deep water on a falling tide we would support it.”

City Councilor Sal LaMattina supported the idea only if it done in accordance with DEP guidelines.

“We got to find a place to put it,” said LaMattina. “With more snow on the way I think if it is done responsibly it shouldn’t pose a huge environmental problem given the extraordinary circumstances.

Former Boston Transportation Secretary John Vitagliano, who has worked on addressing environmental issues in Eastie for decades said he fully supports Mayor Walsh’s intent to explore the feasibility of depositing the city’s excessive and dangerous levels of accumulated snow into Boston Harbor.

“The recent snow storms have deposited unprecedented amounts of snow, up to 80 inches, which have gone far beyond being a public nuisance to one of a significant public safety threat,” he said. “The huge snowdrifts surrounding and blocking the approaches to many roadway intersections create the potential for serious accidents despite the best efforts of clearing them, which have been limited by the absence of storage for the snow. The same holds true for the pedestrian approaches to public transportation facilities which are widely hampered by excessive snow mounds.”

Vitagliano said this might be an appropriate opportunity to explore the possibility of implementing a new policy that would allow utilizing the harbor for depositing snow in the first day or so of snowfall when the new fallen snow is at least as pristine as the harbor itself.

“It should be noted that snow melters are not without environmental consequences,” he said.