

# Environmentalists Suing Over Proposed Richmond Housing Development At Contaminated Waterfront Site

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RICHMOND (BCN/CBS SF) — A coalition of environmental activist groups announced Wednesday that they filed a lawsuit against two state agencies over the environmental impact analysis of a proposed housing project at a contaminated waterfront area in Richmond.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday, argues that the California Environmental Protection Agency and one of its sub-agencies, the state's Department of Toxic Substances Control, approved the proposed development while skirting the state's environmental review process required under the California Environmental Quality Act.

Up to [4,000 housing units](#) would be built and up to 50,000 square feet of retail space at the contaminated former site of a chemical plant owned first by the Stauffer Chemical Company and then the Zeneca pharmaceutical company, now known as AstraZeneca.

The activist groups argued that the housing project is proceeding without proper consideration for the health risks posed by the leftover toxic material as well as potential sea level rise along the Richmond shoreline.

“Building housing on this contaminated site would be an environmental injustice,” Virginia Reinhart, director of the San Francisco Bay chapter of the Sierra Club, said in a statement. “While Richmond needs more affordable housing, we don't want to put communities already overburdened by pollution in harm's way because the responsible agency hasn't analyzed all the risk factors.”

The Sierra Club joined Mothers Against Toxic Housing, Citizens for East Shore Parks, Richmond Shoreline Alliance, Sunflower Alliance, Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice and the Sustainability, Parks, Recycling, and Wildlife Legal Defense Fund in filing the lawsuit.

The Richmond City Council approved the controversial multi-use development in December.

In 2019, the DTSC and the city both approved a cleanup process for the former chemical company site that would include removing some of the remaining contaminated soil while also pouring concrete over the areas affected by toxic waste.

In a statement in 2019 on the concrete capping plan, DTSC officials argued a full soil removal would take roughly a decade to complete and would result in more environmental harm to the Richmond waterfront due to the nearly 65,000 truck trips that would be required to transport and dispose of the toxic materials.

While the DTSC declined Wednesday to comment on the lawsuit, the agency said in a statement that its approved cleanup plan will successfully protect people who will one day live at the former chemical plant site.

“DTSC has been engaging with the communities surrounding this site to find a solution that will protect public health and the environment and minimizes adverse impacts on public health and safety compared to other alternatives,” the agency said in a statement.

Environmental activists argued the concrete cap, however, will not be enough to mitigate the effects of leftover toxic waste and have called on the state to remove the entirety of the contaminated soil in the area.

“The site is open on the sides and bottom, so a concrete cap won't prevent the toxics from moving inland with sea-level rise,” said Faris Jessa of the Richmond Shoreline Alliance. “We don't want a carcinogenic toxic soup coming up under our homes.”

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