

“Atomic” Waste Buoy

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Many years ago, there was a buoy, marked with an “A”, about 10 miles south east of Gales Ledge, Manchester. This was locally called the Atomic Waste Buoy. There was much speculation about what was going on. Low-level radio active wastes (LLW) were permitted for disposal there.

The “A” buoy was used as a mark for local oceans racing. Here is the official word.

In the 1963-1975 period, the U.S. Coast Guard maintained a disposal point marked by the "A" buoy (42° 26.8'N, 70° 35.0'W) in the northern part of the region that was known as the Industrial Waste Site (IWS).

In 1975, the "A" buoy was moved 1.1 nm to the south (42° 25.7'N, 70° 35.0'W) to mark the center of a disposal site also known as the Industrial Waste Site. Two years later, in 1977, this second IWS was replaced by a new disposal site (designated for dredged material only) called the "interim" Massachusetts Bay Disposal Site (iMBDS; center at 42° 25.7'N, 70° 34.0'W). Finally, in 1993 the iMBDS was replaced by the present site for dredged material known as the Massachusetts Bay Disposal Site (MBDS; center at 42° 25.1'N, 70° 35.0'W). It is located southwest of the iMBDS. The MBDS was established so that the disposal site would lie outside the western boundary of the newly designated Stellwagen Bank NMS. This is near the LNG Deep Water Ports. There is no longer an “A” buoy.

Due to the hazardous nature of the materials disposed, the IWS area has been closed to the harvesting of surf clams and ocean quahogs since 1980. There is also a warning against harvesting fish and shellfish from the IWS area included on all nautical charts. Despite these warnings, there have been reports of fishermen retrieving barrels from the seafloor, including an instance of a barrel of industrial waste breaking on the deck of a fishing vessel, injuring the captain.

