

Cianbro touts Brewer mill site progress

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BREWER - Business and civic leaders celebrated the anticipated rebirth of the former Eastern Fine Paper Co. site Friday, touting the project as an example of what is possible when corporations and governments work cooperatively on economic development.

The atmosphere at Friday's gathering at the defunct mill seemed more like a pep rally than a news conference as speaker after speaker praised Cianbro Corp.'s plan to employ up to 500 workers at the proposed manufacturing facility.

During a tour of former mill property, Cianbro President and CEO Peter Vigue said cleanup crews were working hard to prepare the site so that construction of the first prefabricated building "modules" can begin in April, as planned.

"It looks better than it did, but it's not where it needs to be," Vigue said.

But while site cleanup appears to be progressing rapidly, Cianbro still faces some regulatory hurdles.

At the top of the list, Cianbro must receive federal authorization to dredge the Penobscot River so that enormous barges can dock at the facility. To receive the permits, the company will have to show that dredging will not harm endangered sturgeon and salmon known to inhabit that stretch of the river.

Some residents along Penobscot Bay, meanwhile, are fighting a plan to dump the river dredges off their shores.



Cianbro Corp. president and CEO Peter Vigue (third from left) leads a walking tour updating local business leaders and politicians on the cleanup of the company's future module facility at the former Eastern Fine Paper Co. mill site in Brewer on Friday, September 14, 2007. (Bangor Daily News/Bridget Brown) [Buy this photo](#)



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Workers assist in the cleanup of Cianbro's future module facility at the former Eastern Fine Paper Co. mill site in Brewer on Friday, September 14, 2007. The 41-acre site was home to paper mills for more than 100 years and now is contaminated by petroleum, ash, asbestos and lead which must be removed prior to Brewer Module Facility's scheduled opening in April 2008. (Bangor Daily News/Bridget Brown) [Buy this photo](#)

Pittsfield-based Cianbro — and in particular Vigue, its high-profile leader — have been the darlings of the Brewer area ever since the company announced plans to convert the old Eastern Fine mill site into a module manufacturing facility.

Up to 500 well-paid workers are expected to help build the steel building frames, which can stand five or six stories high, weigh in at 1,000 tons and carry a price tag of \$10 million.

Officials with the Bangor Region Development Alliance also used Friday's event to announce that on Dec. 14 and 15 they will host a job fair for potential Cianbro employees and vendors. The career and vendor fair, called "Opportunity Cianbro," will be held at the Bangor Civic Center.

Vigue credited Brewer and state and federal officials with helping expedite the project.

"You hear all of the whining about how you can't do anything in Maine," Vigue said. "Who says you can't do anything in Maine? Look what's happening here."

Cianbro is removing asbestos and other contaminants from several buildings that will remain on the site. Demolition crews could begin removing the rest of the former mill structures next month to make way for a giant, concrete work pad where the modules will be built.

Other parts of the site — including roughly four acres of contaminated soil — will be fenced off and remediated later.

"Make no bones about it. This is not a cakewalk to clean this site up," Vigue said.

Cianbro plans to move the massive completed modules on a 400-by-100-foot barge that will dock at a new pier built at the South Brewer site. But because the modules are so heavy, the company will have to remove up to 33,000 yards of river bottom.

Those dredging plans have stirred up some concerns, however.

Last year, University of Maine researchers documented the first populations of shortnose sturgeon — an endangered species — in the Penobscot in about 30 years. Subsequent research has found that many of the shortnose sturgeon fitted with tracking tags spent the winter in the Bangor-South Brewer area. Federally protected Atlantic salmon are also known to inhabit that part of the river.

Gayle Zydlewski, an assistant professor in UM's School of Marine Sciences, said the research team hopes to get a better sense of exactly where the sturgeon go in the river this winter.

"We haven't said they are right where the Cianbro facility is going, but it is in that area of the river," Zydlewski said.

Jeff Murphy, who handles endangered-species issues for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said he is working on a biological report on the sturgeon that he will present to the Army Corps of Engineers. But Murphy said such dredging projects are not new in Maine.

"We understand the effects and we understand how to minimize the effects" on fish, Murphy said.

Tom Ruksznis, Cianbro's project manager, said the company is working with NOAA and the Army Corps of Engineers to address the concerns over sturgeon and salmon.

Meanwhile, some are fighting plans to dump up to one-third of the dredged material into Penobscot Bay off Rockland.

The area is a certified dumping spot used repeatedly by the Army Corps in the past, but members of the Penobscot Bay Alliance say the dredges take a toll on the aquatic environment, including the bay's thriving lobster community. Instead, they want dredges put on land.

Ruksznis said the company doesn't have enough room to place the clean dredge on land, however.

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