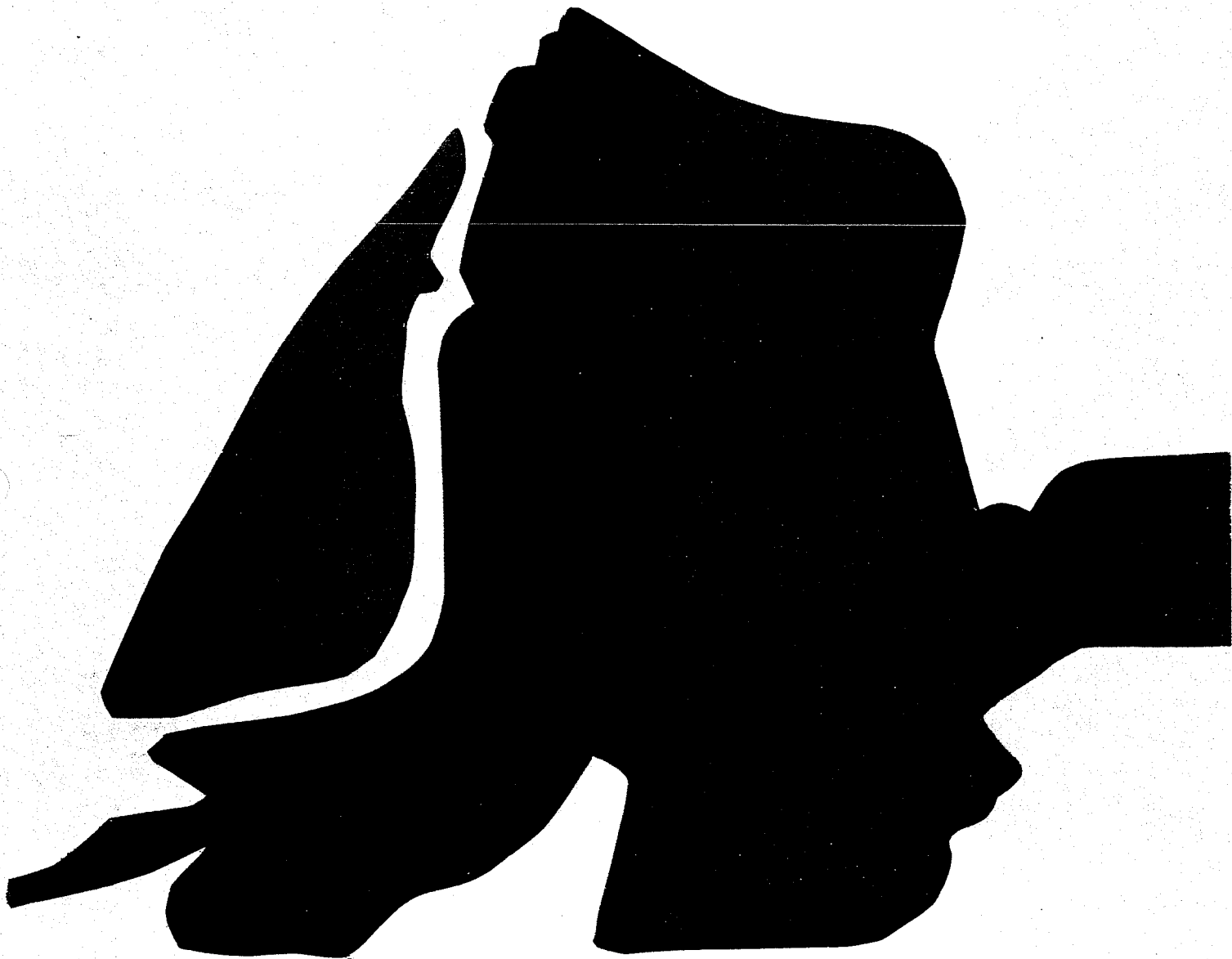


The Phenomenon of Abandoned Hazardous Wastesites



ALLEN HARBOR

a case study

Connie Corderman
May 17, 1985

INTRODUCTION

There are currently over 18,000 potentially hazardous wastesites that have been reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Investigations have been conducted at an estimated 3,000 sites, of which 538 have been identified as posing serious long-term hazards to public health and the environment. Our society is faced with the frightening reality that, the number of abandoned sites requiring immediate cleanup is expected to increase greatly over the next few years.¹ Memories of the catastrophe at Love Canal still linger today, reminding us of what can happen when a wastesite is forgotten, and investigations unnecessarily delayed. Unfortunately, the aforementioned figures indicate that there is an absence of necessary investigations, and ongoing site assessments are slow. The potential for another Love Canal seems great. It is important to look at incidents such as the recent one that occurred at Swartz Creek, Michigan, where, as the result of thorough and timely investigations, damage at a potentially harmful site was limited to temporary health effects.

Having read about incidents such as Love Canal and Swartz Creek, I realized the complex issues involved in investigating the potential hazards caused by wastesites, particularly the difficulty in determining levels of danger and degrees of appropriate response. I then turned to a wastesite in Rhode Island, the Allen Harbor Landfill, as a case study of the phenomenon of abandoned sites. I involved myself with a

non-profit environmental organization, SAVE THE BAY, in order to be close to the situation. It is through this involvement that I became increasingly aware that, although the current data on the Allen Harbor Landfill appears inconclusive, constant vigilance is essential to insure that any potentially hazardous wastesite does not become another Love Canal.

In my opinion, the following three factors have a significant impact on determining the outcome of a site investigation: continued public concern; consistent testing standards; and systematic analyses of available data, with a guarantee that an outside source is overseeing the assessment procedures. This thesis will deal with these issues, specifically focusing on the investigation of the Allen Harbor Landfill. It will introduce the site's historical background, the characters involved in the investigations, and the data that has been compiled thus far.