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EPA to Begin Collecting Additional Samples from Woonasquatucket River on Friday

BOSTON - In an effort to better understand the extent of dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced today that on Friday it will begin collecting additional samples from properties along the river, starting with the Centredale Manor property and the Lee Ramano baseball field.

Additional samples will be collected from dozens of other locations in and alongside the river. The sampling will continue through February. The specific sampling locations will be determined after close consultation with community leaders, state agencies, municipal leaders and other interested parties.

The additional sampling is in response to preliminary data from samples collected last fall showing significantly elevated levels of dioxin contamination at three locations along the river. EPA is hopeful it will receive the finalized data from those samples by this weekend, which will then be shared immediately with the public.

"EPA is pushing the envelope to move this investigation forward. We're bending arms to validate the samples from last fall and we have developed a game plan for additional sampling to take place over the next six weeks," said John P. DeVillars, the EPA's New England Administrator.

EPA took the following additional actions today:

* Established a telephone Hot Line that residents can call to ask questions about the latest sampling data and precautions that should be taken to limit possible exposure. The phone

number is 401-231-9393. The phone will be staffed out of North Providence City Hall from 3 to 9 p.m. tonight and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday. A second phone line will be added tomorrow so that more calls can be handled.

* In an effort to restrict access to areas with elevated levels of dioxin, EPA staff this morning put up yellow caution tape on a portion of the Centerdale Manor property and a riverfront parcel adjacent to the Lee Romano baseball field. Additional sites will be visited tomorrow to determine the appropriateness of fencing.

* EPA met today with the North Providence Mayor, Governor Lincoln Almond and various other state, municipal and community leaders to discuss the new sampling information and actions that will be taken in the coming days and weeks.

EPA initiated sampling in the Woonasquatucket in 1996 upon learning that people were consuming fish caught in the river and has conducted an aggressive sampling and public information campaign since that time.