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Environmental News

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Preliminary Data Results Show Dioxin Contamination in Woonasquatucket River Floodplain

BOSTON – Preliminary results from soil samples collected last month by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showed elevated dioxin levels at three properties in the floodplain next to the Woonasquatucket River in North Providence.

EPA's New England Office collected 240 samples in February and this week received preliminary data for 86 of the samples. Preliminary results from the remaining samples are expected by the end of April.

Levels of dioxin that exceed EPA's action level of one part per billion were found in five surface-soil samples collected from the three properties – all of them floodplain properties and all of them in a quarter-mile stretch of the river from Centredale Manor south to just below Allendale Dam.

EPA staff contacted property owners today and late yesterday to discuss the preliminary data and what actions should be taken to limit exposure to the areas where the higher levels of dioxin were found. Members of the Management Action Committee, which approved the sampling plan that was implemented last month, were briefed about the preliminary findings today.

“These preliminary results are of concern and they confirm that we need to continue our focus on floodplain properties, especially those above Allendale Dam,” said John P. DeVillars, EPA's New England Administrator.

The three properties where elevated dioxin levels were found include a residential lot, an empty lot and the tailrace in the embankment of Allendale Dam.

The preliminary data that was received this week also included results from samples taken last month in three areas: the Centredale Manor property, a wetlands area just south of the property and the area across the river in Johnston. Samples collected from the Centredale Manor property itself had dioxin concentrations above the 1 ppb standard, as did samples from the wetlands area, according to the preliminary results. Dioxin levels across the river in Johnston for samples that have been analyzed so far were below the action level.

The preliminary data needs to go through a quality assurance review by EPA before it can be finalized. That review will be done over the next several months, after EPA receives the full data package from the laboratory in North Carolina that is analyzing the samples.

By mid-April, EPA plans to replace temporary snow fencing in the Centredale Manor area with more secure fencing to limit public access to areas where elevated dioxin levels have been found.

For health related questions, please contact the Family Health Information Line at the R.I. Department of Health. The state Information Line is 1-800-942-7434.

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