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Environmental News

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EPA Reminds Public to Use Woonasquatucket River Responsibly

BOSTON -- With the Woonasquatucket River at its seasonal low flow, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New England Office is reminding the public to avoid both swimming in the river and contact with river sediments, including exposed sediments behind the Allendale Dam.

"With summer upon us, the Woonasquatucket River is an appealing spot for children seeking to escape the heat," said John DeVillars, EPA's New England Administrator. "Residents should be reminding their children to refrain from swimming and wading in the river, to avoid areas where we have identified elevated levels of dioxin in river soils and sediments and not to eat fish caught from the river."

"At the same time, EPA is hard at work collecting hundreds of additional samples so that we can determine the extent of the contamination, particularly in the Centredale Manor area," DeVillars added. "Once we get these samples analyzed, we'll be in a much better position to make responsible cleanup decisions."

Areas with elevated levels of dioxin have been fenced off by EPA's on-site personnel. However, children need to be reminded not to cross taped or fenced off areas.

In the early spring, the R.I. Commission For National & Community Service and more than 300 AmeriCorps members joined with EPA-New England to distribute educational brochures designed to inform the public about the health and dioxin issues surrounding the river. Thousands of households along the river in Smithfield, Johnston, North Providence and Providence received "*Do's & Don't's for the Woonasquatucket River*." Materials were also distributed to community centers, churches, day care centers and local businesses.

EPA reminds the public to use the river responsibly. This includes:

- not eating fish, turtles, eels or plants from the Woonasquatucket River;
- not wading in the shallow water or swimming in the river;
- avoiding coming into contact with exposed sediments in the river; and,

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- obeying the warning signs posted along the river.

Walking, running or bike riding along the river are acceptable activities, as are paddling a canoe or kayak on the river. However, people should wash thoroughly after any contact with the river water or sediment.

For health related questions and information, including the *"Do's and Don't's"* brochure, please contact the Family Health Information Line at the R.I. Department of Health at: 1-800-942-7434. The Family Information Line operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM. On evenings and weekends, callers may leave a name and telephone number. Hotline staff will return the call on the next business day. In addition, health related questions about dioxin can be directed to Dr. David Hewitt at ATSDR's hotline: 1-800-42-ATSDR.

As part of its investigation into what parties are responsible for the dioxin contamination, EPA has established a toll-free tips line so that residents who have knowledge about past activities at the site can come forward with information. The toll-free number is: 888-372-7341.

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