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Woonasquatucket project to begin

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NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Today, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency workers will begin surveying along the Woonasquatucket River, where it flows past the Centredale Manor and Brook Village elderly housing complexes.

The Superfund site there has long been a focus of clean-up efforts by the EPA, but this project will excavate, seal and pave the riverbed, restoring the old factory tailrace so that the river can flow.

Ted Bzenas, the EPA's on-site coordinator for the project, said he met last week with residents of Centredale Manor and Brook Village to discuss the project and listen to their concerns. "I think it went really well," he said.

He had been anticipating concerns that the project -- which will necessitate the destruction of some trees and most vegetation along the riverbank -- would destroy the residents' peaceful view. But most seemed not upset at the prospect, Bzenas said.

"We talked about their view now, and then I explained to them what the view will look like in the future, how it will change," he said. "... They seemed to accept that as an improvement because of other conditions that will be improved."

The project will improve drainage, he said, reducing "odors from the swamp" and a persistent mosquito problem.

Some residents were concerned about the noise of construction. There will be some heavy equipment, Bzenas replied, and some chainsaws. But workers will be instructed not to start construction until after 8 a.m.

Workers will be marking trees for removal by mid-week, he said, wearing blue or white Tyvek suits to protect themselves from the dioxins polluting the soil.

Once the river is excavated and sealed, it will be able to accommodate runoff from Smith Street without washing pollutants out into nearby ponds, Bzenas said.

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