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EPA to further test river for extent of pollution

■ Test wells will be dug along with Woonasquatucket River in a new round of sampling to help determine the "long-term cleanup alternatives."

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Superfund Records Center
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NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The cleanup of the Superfund site on the Woonasquatucket River will enter a new phase this week when a contractor begins digging wells to test ground water and deeper soils for possible contamination.

The Environmental Protection Agency has already conducted extensive soil and sediment sampling in and along the river. The tests, completed about two years ago, revealed potentially harmful levels of dioxins and other contaminants, and led the federal agency to declare in February that the river was eligible for Superfund aid.

Now the EPA is undertaking additional testing to more precisely gauge the extent of the pollution at the site, adjacent to Centredale Manor and Brook Village, two high-rise apartment buildings for the elderly.

"This new round of sampling is another important step in gathering the information we need to evaluate long-term cleanup alternatives and select a final cleanup plan for the site," Mindy S. Lubber, regional administrator for the EPA, said in a statement.

In October, the EPA proposed an interim plan to eliminate the threat of dioxin exposure and to prevent the confirmed carcinogen from spreading downstream. The agency recommended excavating 2,500 cubic yards of tainted soil and allowing a significantly larger amount to be submerged underwater by restoring the breached Allendale Dam.

Last month, the EPA held a public hearing in North Providence on the plan. Although it received support from local officials and environmentalists, the agency is still reviewing public comments and has not yet announced a decision. The work would begin in the summer.

At the hearing last month, EPA officials emphasized that the plan was not a permanent solution to problems at the site. They said further studies would be needed to address the scope of the contamination and determine what to do over the long-term about contaminated soil left underwater and along industrial properties along the western bank of the river.

That work begins this week with the installation of a series of wells to test ground water on both sides of the river and around Centredale Manor and Brook Village. The EPA believes that a former chemical company and drum recycling operation once located at the site were responsible for the contamination.

Contractors installing the wells will work roughly from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday through next month, excluding holidays. They will return in the spring and early summer.

Neighbors should expect noise as a result of the drilling. Air monitoring will be conducted during the drilling to avoid any reduction in air quality.

Workers will be wearing impermeable white suits, gloves, boots, eye protection and face masks.

"This is mandated by federal law and does not mean that you are in any danger," the EPA wrote in a newsletter about the project.

Soil or water extracted during the drilling will be temporarily stored in drums inside fenced areas. The black drums with white lids will eventually be removed and disposed of at a site for hazardous materials.

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