

Public Meeting in North Providence, RI

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Public Health And The Woonasquatucket River

January 13, 1998



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Meeting Agenda

- Accomplishments
- EPA Fish Tissue & Sediment Testing Results
- Do's and Don'ts for the Woonasquatucket River
- Timeline for Action
 - Current Activities
 - Next Steps
- Questions, Answers & Discussion



Accomplishments

1996

- May 16: Fish Tissue Sampling & EPA Risk Screen.
- October 15: EPA & DOH issue Catch & Release Press Release.
- September 30: EPA Human Health Risk Screen completed.
- Fall: Public Information Brochure “Not All Fish Are Safe to Eat” produced and distributed along with community meetings.

1997

- January: EPA requests lab assistance for follow-up testing.
- October 23-24: EPA takes 7 sediment samples from river.
- The Providence Plan: Starts designing sign to warn residents not to eat fish from the river.
- July 30: DEM public meeting to identify watershed priorities.



Progress in 1998

- **January:** Urban Rivers Team created.
- **June:** Providence Plan posts “Don’t Eat The Fish” signs in Spanish & English. Urban Rivers Team creates Health & Education Subcommittee.
- **July 2:** EPA & DOH issue Press Release reaffirming catch & release plus dioxin & PCB sediment findings.
- **Mid-July:** Final Project Report on sediment tests & EPA orders 40 more “Don’t Eat the Fish” signs.
- **August:** EPA produces “Do’s and Don’ts for the Woonasquatucket River” brochure and holds Public Meeting in North Providence.



EPA Fish Tissue Sampling

May 1996:

- EPA collected fish and eel and from two locations on the Woonasquatucket River.
 - Valley Street
 - Waterplace Park

Analysis:

- Samples were analyzed for 15 contaminants including metals, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides, and dioxins.



Fish Tissue Sampling - Continued

Results:

- Elevated levels of dioxins, PCBs and mercury were detected in the fish tissue.

Actions:

- Based on the results, EPA conducted a risk screen to identify potential human health risks.
- The risk screen resulted in RI Department of Health issuing a fish advisory recommending a “Catch and Release” policy for fishing.



EPA Sediment Sampling

October 23-24, 1997:

- EPA followed up the fish tissue tests with sediment sampling. Seven samples were taken behind dams located in a 7 mile stretch of the Woonasquatucket River.

Analysis:

- The samples were analyzed for metals, pesticides, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), PAHs, and dioxins.



Sediment Sampling - Continued

Results:

- Dioxins were confirmed at all 7 sampling sites, and the highest concentrations were located at Allendale Dam and Lymanville Dam.
- Final results were reported on July 31, 1998.

Actions:

- Based on results, EPA and the RI Department of Health issued a press release communicating findings on July 2, 1998.
- EPA designed a more comprehensive sampling program for the Woonasquatucket River.



Current Activities

EPA Additional Soil & Sediment Sampling:

- Samples were chosen based on areas that had:
 - High potential for human exposure
 - Frequent flooding potential
 - Locations of concern identified in earlier samplings
 - Areas along the river identified as potential sources of contamination
- Some proposed sample locations in North Providence include:
 - Allendale Dam
 - Lee Romano Little League Field
 - Lymanville Dam
 - Centredale Manor Property
- Samples will be analyzed for:
 - Dioxin
 - Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)
 - Semivolatile Organic Compounds (SVOCs)
 - Total Organic compounds (TOCs)
 - Hexachloroxanthene (HCX)
 - Pesticides

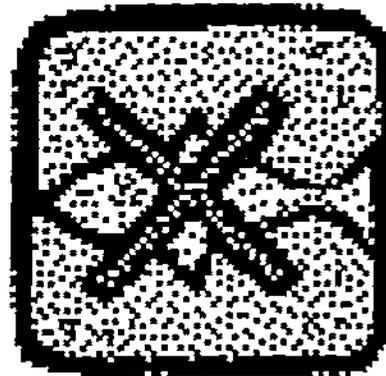
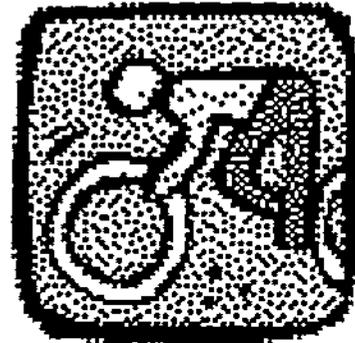


DRAFT

DO'S & DON'TS

For The

Woonasquatucket River



Presentation Overview

- Background
- The Woonasquatucket River Is A Valuable Resource
- What We Know
- What We Don't Know
- What You Can Do To Be Safe
- Do's and Don'ts for the Woonasquatucket River
- Current Activities & Next Steps
- How To Get Involved
- Questions, Answers & Discussion

Background

- The Woonasquatucket River was a valuable commercial resource for business and industry (i.e. mills, jewelry, power).
- For years the river was covered by a large bridge in downtown Providence and was very difficult to see.
- People in Olneyville often called it the Almacs River after the old Almacs grocery store it flowed past.
- The river flows through the urban communities of:
 - North Smithfield
 - Johnston
 - North Providence
 - Providence

The Woonasquatucket Is A Valuable Resource

- Valuable Natural Resource In Your Urban Community
 - Recreation
 - Family Activities
 - Art (Waterfire, sculpture, murals, etc.)
- Waterfront Property Is Potentially More Valuable
 - Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project
 - 1998 American Heritage River Designation
 - Access to Nature
- Local Industry
 - Canoes, kayaks, restaurants, bicycle shops, etc.

What We Know

Although the river is cleaner and fish and wildlife are returning, there is still contamination in the Woonasquatucket River.

- SEWAGE & BACTERIA:

- There are high levels of bacteria and sewage in the Woonasquatucket River after heavy rains -- a lot of this is from combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

CSOs = Pipes that drain raw sewage into a water source (like the Woonasquatucket River) when the sewage system overflows -- especially during heavy rains.

- This problem is being addressed by the Dept. of Environmental Management, Narragansett Bay Commission & EPA.

What We Know (Continued)

- DIOXINS & PCBs:

- EPA testing found chemical pollutants (dioxin, PCBs) and heavy metals in fish, eels and in the sediment behind dams on the Woonasquatucket River.

DIOXIN & PCBs = Groups of man-made chemicals that cause long-term health problems to humans, including cancer.

SEDIMENT = Soil at the bottom of a river.

- TRASH, WASTE:

- There is a lot of waste, trash, and tires illegally dumped in the Woonasquatucket River.

What We Don't Know

- The source of the contamination.
- If flooding has spread dioxins and PCBs to the yards along the river.
- If any contamination has spread to the river banks.
- If other urban rivers in Providence, like the Moshassuck River and the Blackstone River, have the same types of contamination.

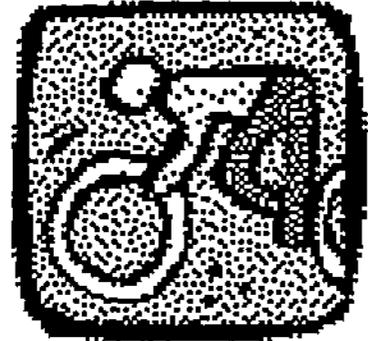
What You Can Do To Be Safe

- The greatest immediate public health concern is from the high sewage levels found in the Woonasquatucket River after heavy rainfall.
- BE CAUTIOUS!!! Because there is still a lot of information that we don't know, it is best to be cautious to make sure you and your family are safe.
- If you or your family comes in contact with the water in the Woonasquatucket River -- **WASH WITH SOAP AND WATER!**

DO'S for the Woonasquatucket River

It's OK to:

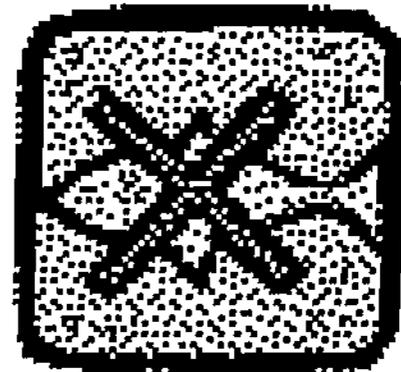
- Canoe
- Walk
- Run
- Play Sports
- Bike Ride
- Kayak
- Sail
- Fish for fun - Catch & Release Below Smithfield Line!
- Enjoy & Explore Nature



DON'TS for the Woonasquatucket River

To keep you and your family safe until we learn more, please
DO NOT:

- Swim
- Wade
- Eat Fish, Eels or any other animals or plants
from the river
- Drink river water
- Play in river water
- Bathe in the river



Current Activities & Next Steps

- Fall 1998:
 - EPA begins more comprehensive sampling for soils and sediments.
 - Health & Education Subcommittee completes new brochure, new signs created and posted along Woonasquatucket River focusing on "Do's & Don'ts", and starts community presentations.
- Winter 1999:
 - EPA sample results return from laboratory & analysis begins.
- Spring 1999:
 - EPA discloses results, with public meetings to answer questions.
 - Identify next steps based on data results, analysis findings and community priorities.

How to Get Involved

- **The Woonasquatucket River Greenway**
 - *CONTACT: The Providence Plan*
Lisa Aurecchia or Clara Pang (401) 455-8880
- **The Woonasquatucket Watershed Coalition**
 - *CONTACT: Gina DeMarco (401) 949-1480*
- **Health & Education Subcommittee of the Urban Rivers Team & EPA Region 1**
 - *CONTACT: Kristi Rea (617) 918-1595*

Next Steps in 1998

- **September 1:**
 - EPA final work plan for additional sampling.
- **Week of September 13-17:**
 - EPA begins more comprehensive field sampling for soils and sediments. More “Don’t Eat The Fish” signs will be posted along Woonasquatucket River.
- **End of October:**
 - Health & Education Subcommittee completes new brochure, new signs created and posted along Woonasquatucket River focusing on “Do’s & Don’ts”.
- **Fall:**
 - Health & Education Subcommittee creates and implements plan for community presentations to educate local residents.



Next Steps in 1999

- **Mid-January:**

- EPA sample results return from laboratory.
- Results submitted to EPA Risk Assessment Office for evaluation and review.

- **Mid-April:**

- Risk Assessment results completed.

- **End of April:**

- Public disclosure of information, including public meetings to answer questions.
- Identify next steps based on data results, risk assessment findings and community priorities.

