11.2.2000 08:15

Woonasquatucket River cleanup effort lauded

■ The throngs that turned out when dioxin was first found in the river dwindle to fewer than 50 for a local hearing of the Environmental Protection Agency.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- When the Environmental Protection Agency discovered high levels of dioxin along the Woonasquatucket River nearly two years ago, hundreds of alarmed residents turned out at public meetings to ask questions and voice concerns.

Last night, one month after the EPA announced its clean-up plans for the Superfund site, fewer than 40 people showed up for a public hearing on the proposals. Of those, only a handful spoke. Most were government officials and nearly all applauded the agency's efforts.

"Thank you very much," resident Steve Pitassi told EPA officials attending the hearing. "You're doing a great job."

The meeting at Town Hall ended less than one hour after it began.

EPA announced earlier this month that it favors excavating and removing some sediments at the Superfund site, while allowing a much larger amount of them to be submerged following the restoration of the breached Allendale Dam.

The agency estimates that the project would cost as much as $2.6 million. It would serve as an interim measure, reducing any immediate threats to public health from dioxin and preventing the known carcinogen from further spreading downstream. Work is expected to begin in the summer.

It will take another two years for EPA to determine the best way to address the contaminated sediments under water and those left exposed next to industrial properties along the western bank of the river, according to team leader Dick Boynton. The agency must also develop a permanent solution to the contaminated sediments it capped last winter next to Centredale Manor, the high-rise apartment complex.

Eugenia Marks, spokeswoman for the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, said her organization supports the plans to excavate 2,365 cubic yards of contaminated sediments, which will be trucked to an incinerator in Canada. But, she said, "I am concerned that we recognize this as an interim measure."

Audubon will continue to press for the return of the river to a condition where it can be used for fishing and swimming.

Don Asselin, who lives along the river, echoed those sentiments. He said the project might eliminate the threat of dioxin, but that it does not address other potential sources of pollution, including the sewage treatment plant upstream in North Smithfield.

"If you want to make it swimmable, you can't pour raw sewage into it," he said.

Asselin said he also is concerned that raising the level of Allendale Pond, by repairing the dam, will cause flooding problems for area residents that went away when the dam was breached in 1991.

"When that river swells up, it can get out of control," he said. "I'd like to see what you are proposing for flood controls."

Boynton said the dam would be constructed with controls to moderate the pond's water level.

Marks and Pitassi suggested that the dam also be equipped with "fish ladders," devices that allow spawning fish to swim upstream. Dams prevent fish from reaching spawning grounds.

Resident Paul McEloy, upon hearing that the sediments would be trucked away for incineration, said, "My concern is we are transferring the problem to someone else."

State Sen. John Celona (D-North Providence) said EPA's plans for next summer keep the clean-up efforts moving in the direction of returning the river to the best condition possible.

Others who spoke in favor of EPA's plan included Johnston Mayor William Macera and a representative for the state Department of Environmental Management.

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2904

10.16.2000 08:03

Immersion plan would limit dioxin removal, EPA study says

Centredale Manor 13.3 8904

■ Raising the water level in the Allendale Pond would cover much of the contaminated soil, reducing the amount that would need to be excavated.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is recommending a novel way to deal with a daunting amount of dioxin-contaminated sediments along the banks of the Woonasquatucket River.

Don't remove them, the agency says: Submerge them under water.

A key feature of the EPA's plan to clean up the Superfund site is to restore the breached Allendale Dam, allowing the pond it holds back to return to historic levels. The rise in water would cover a substantial amount of contaminated soil now exposed near a residential neighborhood.

The EPA would excavate the dioxin-tainted sediments left above the surface of Allendale Pond -- as well as those downstream from the dam in Lymansville Pond -- and have them taken to be incinerated. They would then be disposed of at a landfill as non-hazardous waste.

EPA officials estimate that the project -- an interim measure meant to reduce any threats to public health -- would cost as much as $2.6 million. Work is expected to begin in the summer.

"This phase of the project is not the final phase for the Woonasquatucket," Dick Boynton, the EPA's team leader, cautioned at a public forum held last week at Town Hall. "It's a residential response. We still have a long way to go."

A public hearing will be held on the proposal at 7 p.m. on Nov. 1 at Town Hall.

Boynton said the EPA must ultimately determine the best way to address the contaminated sediments under water and those left exposed next to industrial properties along the western bank of the river. The agency must also develop a permanent solution to the contaminated sediments it capped last winter next to Centredale Manor, the high-rise apartment complex. These studies will take about two years to complete, he said.

The EPA's strategy, according to Angela Bonarrigo, the agency's community coordinator, has been to ask, "How can we take a bite out of the problem sooner?"

The agency commissioned a study last summer to help answer that question. The study outlined four ways to address the exposed, contaminated soil on the eastern side of the river, where residential streets dead end off of Woonasquatucket Avenue.

The options:

Restore Allendale dam and place earthen caps over the contaminated sediments not submerged by the resulting rising waters. About 415 cubic yards of sediment would have to be removed as a result of repairing the breached dam. Estimated cost: $1.8 million.

Leave the dam as is and cap a much larger area of contaminated sediments. No sediments would have to be removed. Estimated cost: $2.6 million.

Leave the dam as is and remove all of the exposed sediments. About 28,615 cubic yards of material would have to be removed (about six trucks a day for a year). Estimated cost: $4.5 million to $14 million, depending on whether the material would be incinerated before disposal or simply consolidated on site and capped.

Restore the dam and excavate the contaminated sediments left high and dry. About 2,365 cubic yards would have to be removed (four trucks a day for a month). Estimated cost: $1.8 million to $2.6 million.

This last scenario is EPA's preferred option because it "contributes to a permanent solution to contamination at the site," according to an EPA statement. Also, the cost is only slightly more than the first two choices, and significantly less than the third.

Anna Krasko, project manager for the EPA, said the money will either come from the companies the EPA holds responsible for the contamination or, if they resist, from the federal Superfund.

"I think it is the proper way to go. It's a great proposal," Mayor A. Ralph Mollis told the crowd of about 25 people.

Some in the audience wanted to know how clean the river will be after the work is undertaken.

8904

"My ultimate concern is that you bring this river to fishable and swimmable [conditions]," said Grant DulGarian, of Providence. "Whichever is the alternative that would do that, I would support that."

The interim work on the exposed sediments won't raise the river quality to levels that would allow for swimming and fishing, Bonarrigo said. But, she said, "All four of these alternatives made the cut because they move forward in that direction."

Comments about the EPA's plans may be mailed to Anna Krasko, remedial project manager, 1 Congress St., Suite 1100 (HBO), Boston, Mass., 02114. They may also be faxed to (617) 918-1281 or e-mailed to krasko.anna#epa.gov

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Anna Krasko

NORTH PROVIDENCE NORTH STAR

NORTH PROVIDENCE, RI
WEEKLY 7,500

OCT 12 2000

NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC

EPA Says Remove, Burn Soil

Agency seeks permanent solution to dioxin threat

By Greg Paré

Approximately 30 residents turned out for a public meeting to discuss the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) options to cleanup areas near the Woonasquatucket River with soil contaminated with the carcinogen dioxin.

The EPA emphasized permanence in its recommended solution.

They presented the public with four alternatives:

Alternative One: cap residential soils and flood-plain sediments and restore the Allendale Dam.

Alternative Two: cap residential soils and flood-plain sediments.

Alternative Three: excavate residential soils and flood-plain sediments and restore the Allendale Dam.

Alternative Four: excavate residential soils and flood-plain sediments.

Alternatives one, three, and four would generate excavated soil and sediment which may be contaminated and which would need to be disposed of. The EPA considered three options of disposal: consolidating and capping at an area on-site, disposing at an approved off-site landfill, or off-site treatment and disposal at a properly permitted facility.

The EPA compared the alternatives and disposal options based on effectiveness and "implementability," and cost. The agency then selected alternative three as its preferred plan. The EPA wants to excavate affected residential soils and flood-plain sediments, restore the Allendale Dam, and provide off-site treatment and disposal of soil and sediment.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, in attendance at the public hearing Tuesday night, also spoke in favor of the EPA's favored alternative, although he noted that he wished to hear public feedback as well.

The public meeting Tuesday evening followed an Open House earlier in the afternoon. Both forums were held in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall.

Additionally, a public hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, November 1, in the Council Chambers.

The public is invited to comment on the proposals through November 3. Send written comments, postmarked no later than that date, to Anna Krasko, project manager, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New England Region, 1 Congress Street, Suite 1100 (HBO), Boston, mass. 02114. Members of the public may also e-mail comments to krasko.anna@epa.gov.

"The cost of Alternative Three is slightly more than some [other alternatives], but it offers a more effective approach and contributes to a permanent solution to contamination at the site," explains an informational packet distributed by the EPA at the meeting.

"This alternative satisfies the statutory preference for treatment of residential-use soils and flood plain sediments, while Alternatives One and Two do not. Disposal Option Three was selected because it is the only permanent treatment option for the contaminated soils and sediments, and because the cost is not prohibitive when compared to the other options."

11

10.6.2000 08:21

EPA's dioxin cleanup plan praised

■ The agency's announcement of its preferred method of dealing with contaminiation along the Woonasquatucket River is a "step in the right direction," one lawmaker says.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Local officials welcomed this week's announcement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that removing sediments contaminated with dioxin is the best way to clean up the Woonasquatucket River and that work on the Superfund site could begin this summer.

On Monday, the agency said that it is recommending the excavation of 2,500 cubic yards of tainted soils and the restoration of Allendale Dam to eliminate the threat of dioxin exposure and to prevent the confirmed carcinogen from spreading downstream.

"EPA has put together an aggressive approach to resolving the contamination and restoring the Woonasquatucket to the valuable resource we all envision," said Mayor A. Ralph Mollis.

Mollis said it is somewhat frustrating that dioxin remains along the river two years after tests of sediments revealed high levels of dioxin. But he said the complexity of the cleanup project is to blame, not the EPA.

"It's just a case of wishing and hoping we had been further along and that we would have a timetable very shortly of finishing this project," said Mollis, who sits on a committee of federal, state and local officials overseeing the cleanup. "Obviously, a project of this magnitude is going to take some time, and we are addressing it aggressively."

State Sen. John Celona, D-North Providence, said the announcement is a "step in the right direction." The plan, he said, "will restore the Woonasquatucket to its natural state. ... People in the community will be able to enjoy it as a natural resource."

Celona recalled holding an informational meeting for residents in 1998 on the possible contamination of the river.

"To get from there to where we are today, it has been a very long journey," he said.

In January 1999, the EPA announced that tests of soil sediments taken from the Woonasquatucket revealed potentially dangerous levels of dioxins and other contaminants.

The EPA cordoned off the area from the public and placed temporary earthen caps over pockets of contaminated soil. The agency continues to warn the public not to bathe in the river, not to drink from it and not to eat fish caught in its waters.

In February, the agency officially designated the site, near Centredale Manor and the Johnston town line, as a Superfund site, eligible for federal cleanup funds. The EPA, following Superfund protocol, then commissioned a $200,000 study of the site to determine the various alternatives for addressing the river contamination.

One of those alternatives is the one that the EPA announced this week as its preferred plan.

Both Mollis and Celona were pleased to hear that a substantial amount of contaminated soil will be removed from the site, rather than left there under some sort of a protective cover.

"I would rather see it removed than capped permanently," Celona said.

Mollis said "the approach is one of the more aggressive approaches."

The mayor said he is reserving his "final judgment" on the EPA plan until the close of a public comment period on Nov. 3.

On Tuesday, the results of that study will be the subject of an open house from 4 to 6 p.m. and an informational meeting at 7 p.m. Both are being held in the council chambers of Town Hall, 1000 Smith St.

A public hearing, where comments will be recorded by a stenographer, will be held at 7 p.m. on Nov. 1 at Town

Hall. Comments may be mailed to Anna Krasko, remedial project manager, 1 Congress St., Suite 1100 (HBO), Boston, Mass., 02114. They may also be faxed to (617) 918-1281 or e-mailed to krasko.anna@epa.gov

"I would encourage anyone who has any interest whatsoever in this entire issue to please attend the workshop that's being presented, but mostly the public hearing," Mollis said.

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10.4.2000 00:56

EPA wants tainted soil along river removed

▪ The federal agency is also recommending Allendale Dam be restored to block the spread of dioxin along the Woonasquatucket.

By EDWARD FITZPATRICK
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced yesterday that the best way to deal with dioxin-contaminated sediments along the Woonasquatucket River is to thoroughly remove them.

The agency is recommending the excavation of 2,500 cubic yards of tainted soil and the restoration of Allendale Dam to eliminate the threat of dioxin exposure and to prevent the confirmed carcinogen from spreading downstream.

"Now that we've taken short-term measures to stop the spread of contamination, we're focusing our attention on the long-term restoration of the flood-plain areas and Allendale Dam, beginning next summer," Mindy S. Lubber, regional administrator of the EPA's New England office, said in a statement.

In January 1999, EPA officials announced that tests of soil sediments taken from the Woonasquatucket River revealed potentially dangerous levels of dioxins and other contaminants. Residents expressed concerns for children and others who use the river for recreation, and area home owners feared their property values would be harmed.

The EPA cordoned off the area from the public and placed temporary earthen caps over pockets of contaminated soil. The agency continues to warn the public not to bathe in the river, not to drink from it and not to consume fish caught in its waters. People who come in contact with the river are advised to cleanse themselves with soapy water.

This past February, the agency officially designated the site, near Centredale Manor and the Johnston town line, as a Superfund site, eligible for federal cleanup funds. The EPA, following Superfund protocol, then commissioned a $200,000 study of the site to determine how to address the river contamination.

On Tuesday, the results of that study will be the subject of an open house from 4 to 6 p.m. and an informational meeting at 7 p.m. Both are being held in the council chambers of Town Hall, 1000 Smith St.

A public hearing, at which comments will be recorded by a stenographer, will be held at 7 p.m. on Nov. 1 at Town Hall.

"The cleanup plan we're unveiling today brings us another major step forward in reclaiming the Woonasquatucket River as a resource for the community. We look forward to hearing from the public on this next big step in erasing dioxin contamination from the river," Lubber said.

The public has until Nov. 3 to submit written comments to the EPA on the agency's preferred cleanup plan. The comments should be mailed to Anna Krasko, remedial project manager, 1 Congress St., Suite 1100 (HBO), Boston, Mass. 02114. They may also be faxed to (617) 918-1281 or e-mailed to krasko.anna@epa.gov

During the comment period, the public is invited to review the study, formally known as an "engineering evaluation/cost analysis." It is available by contacting the EPA Records Center at (617) 918-1440, or mailing correspondence to the attention of the Records Center at the above address.

3

Angela Bonarrigo - RAA

EPA - New England Daily News Clips

The Providence Journal June 27, 2000

Officials say EPA report not cause for alarm

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE — The chemical dioxin is far more harmful to human health than previously believed, according to new evidence, but officials say there is no need for people who live or play along the contaminated Woonasquatucket River to be alarmed.

The Environmental Protection Agency earlier this month released a long-awaited draft report that for the first time identifies dioxin as a confirmed carcinogen. It also estimates that the risk of cancer from dioxin is as high as 1 in 100, about 10 times greater than estimated 6 years ago.

But state and federal officials familiar with the

NORTH PROVIDENCE

Woonasquatucket say that, regardless of dioxin's dangers, all necessary precautions have been taken to reduce human exposure to the high levels of the chemical detected along the river more than a year ago.

"If you're not exposed, then you're not at risk," said the EPA's Dick Boynton, who is in charge of Superfund sites in Rhode Island.

In February, a section of the Woonasquatucket near the Johnston town line was designated a Superfund site, making it eligible for federal cleanup funds.

But it was soon after dangerous levels of dioxin were found near Centredale Manor, where chemicals were manufactured and barrels reclaimed for years, that the EPA began safeguarding the public from exposure to dioxin. About $2 million has been spent erecting fencing, capping exposed soil with high levels of dioxin, and launching an information campaign warning people not to swim in the river, drink the water or eat the fish.

"We've taken care of a lot of the exposure issues already. I don't think there are any changes in our strategy there," Boynton said. "We are going to move forward to investigate ways to remove, to eliminate or reduce the exposure to any of the dioxin in the soils and sediments."

Most officials qualified their remarks by emphasizing that the EPA "dioxin reassessment" must undergo an exhaustive scientific review before a final report is issued. That is expected near the end of the year, according to Martha Casey, an EPA spokeswoman in Washington, D.C.

/

5.16.2000

5 companies agree to river cleanup

n The companies, cited by the Environmental Protection Agency as potentially responsible for Woonasquatucket River contamination, had earlier declined to assist in the work.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Five companies recently cited by the Environmental Protection Agency as potentially responsible for dioxin found along the Woonasquatucket River have agreed to perform cleanup work at the federally designated Superfund site.

EPA officials last month expressed disappointment that the companies had declined requests to help clean up the stretch of river in Centredale where dioxins and other contaminants were discovered 1 1/2 years ago.

The EPA ordered the companies to finish capping contaminated soil at Centredale Manor, a high-rise apartment complex for the elderly. The agency had begun work on the cap, an interim measure intended to limit human exposure and prevent the contaminants from spreading to the river.

"I am pleased to see the responsible parties step up to the plate to complete these time-critical public health measures at Centredale Manor and along the Woonasquatucket," Mindy S. Lubber, the agency's regional director, said in a statement.

The EPA has spent approximately $2 million testing soil under and adjacent to the river, fencing areas where contaminants were detected and placing a vegetative cap on contaminated soil south of the Centredale Manor parking lot. The second cap, on which the agency began work, is located between Centredale Manor and Brook Village, another high-rise apartment building for the elderly.

In correspondence last month, the EPA ordered the five companies to begin the work by the end of this month. The job entails finishing the cap and introducing flood-control measures.

This cap will be completed by Loureiro Associates of Plainville, Conn., the company hired by the five parties identified in the EPA order. The companies are Crown Metro, Emhart Industries and New England Container Co., all factories, and Brook Village Associates and Centredale Manor Associates, the owners of the apartment buildings.

The EPA is continuing to investigate the extent of contamination along the river.

The work undertaken at the river so far is mostly temporary. Later this year, the results of a $200,000 study on exactly how to clean up the river as far south as the Lymansville Dam will be made public. According to preliminary figures, it could cost $3 million to $6 million to remove soil near the apartment buildings and an additional $5 million to $10 million to address the contaminants in the river sediments.

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4.17.2000

Warnings and advisories top states' menus for fish

■ Rhode Island issues the most concise alert as state health officials put out their annual lists on where -- and how much -- to fish.

By PETER B. LORD
Journal Environment Writer

As the recreational fishing season gets under way, the Rhode Island Department of Health and similar agencies in nearby states are engaging in another rite of spring: issuing health alerts and advisories on which fish are safe to eat.

Rhode Island's warning is the briefest:

Don't eat any fish from the Woonasquatucket River below the Smithfield line because of suspected dioxin contamination.

Don't eat bass from the Quidnick Reservoir in Coventry because of elevated mercury levels.

And you should eat no more than one meal per month of striped bass, bluefish, swordfish or shark because they tend to have elevated levels of mercury or polychorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

The warnings from Connecticut and Massachusetts are far more elaborate.

Connecticut publishes a brochure called "If I catch it, can I eat it?" and a map showing ponds and lakes where there is pollution from PCBs, mercury or chlordane.

For some of those water bodies, the Connecticut Health Department warns "high risk" people -- pregnant women, women planning to get pregnant within a year and children under the age of 6 -- to eat no fish.

Massachusetts lists 112 rivers, lakes and ponds and assigns one of six advisory codes that range from a limit of two meals per month to a total ban on consumption.

Health officials say the warnings provide a sobering glimpse at the extent of pollution in our environment.

But some also worry that they'll give the wrong impression, incorrectly suggesting that fish aren't good for people.

"The problem I have with fish advisories is that in general people who eat fish, the cultures who eat fish, are healthy," said Robert Vanderslice, chief of health-risk assessment at the Rhode Island Department of Health. "I really don't want to discourage people from eating fish."

Commercially produced foods are heavily regulated, Vanderslice said, and foods that go bad or are contaminated are regularly pulled off the market.

But Vanderslice says you shouldn't automatically assume a store-bought food item is good and fresh fish is bad just because there is a health advisory issued on the fish.

"It's one thing to talk about contaminated fish and another to talk about the heart-disease risk of a hamburger," Vanderslice said. "How do you compare the health risks of high fat versus low fat, and then compare that to organ damage caused by mercury? These are very difficult comparisons to make."

Vanderslice said the federal government sets "action levels" for fish that are 10 times lower than for chicken, for instance, because of concerns that people will eat a lot of fish from one location and be more at risk.

Chicken could come from a variety of sources, he said, so there's less fear that someone would be exposed to too much of a single contaminant.

The sources of contamination behind the fishing alerts are varied. The PCBs, originally used as an insulating material in electronic equipment, are usually found in polluted harbors. They are picked up by small fish that are eaten by bigger fish, which tend to accumulate the PCBs.

Mercury is more pervasive. Some of it occurs naturally and it leaches into water bodies as earth erodes. Some is released into the atmosphere as a result of burning by utilities and incinerators. Once it falls in water, mercury enters the aquatic food chain and accumulates increasingly in larger, older fish.

Mercury can damage the nervous system and it poses a particular risk to unborn children.

Vanderslice said the Health Department is working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to sample more

fish in Rhode Island.

"We want to come up with a surveillance scheme for 80 different bodies of water in the state. "I think using fish as a tool for ambient surveillance is very good."

He said the dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket was discovered two years ago because of routine fish analysis. (Now the area is listed as as federal Superfund cleanup site.)

"There weren't any fish in the Woonasquatucket 20 years ago," he said. "Those waters were toxic. Now they're clean enough to support life. Still, the traditional Rhode Islander would never think of fishing there because they knew what went into it. Then the Southeast Asians came and to them it was cleaner than what they were used to at home, so they fished."

Vanderslice said fishermen should be cautious.

"What I really want people to take home is: We don't know what the levels of contaminants are in any of these ponds and rivers -- really. Maybe somebody just got rid of a gallon of pesticide by dumping it in the pond."

"So the point is, don't fish in the same pond every day. If you eat different fish from various places, you'll be healthy."

You can look at the health advisories online in Rhode Island at http:www.health.state.ri.us/, Massachusetts at http:www.magnet.state.ma.us/dph/beha/fishlist.htm., or Connecticut at http:www.state.ct.us/dph/BCH/webfish.htm.

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RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

~~ Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities ~~

PRESS RELEASE

Rhode Island Department of Health
3 Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908
401-222-2231
401-222-6548(fax)
1-800-745-5555(TTY)

For Immediate Release: April 6, 2000
Contact: RI Department of Health
RI Department of Environmental Management
(HEALTH) Robert Vanderslice, PhD 222-3424x2103
(DEM) Gail Mastrati: 401-222-4700x2402

Fish Advisory from HEALTH and DEM

Thousands of residents and tourists will flock to Rhode Island's freshwater rivers and ponds for the opening of trout season on April 8. For many, part of the enjoyment of fishing is eating the fish caught that day.

Those who enjoy eating fish may already be aware of the health benefits associated with making fish part of a healthy diet.* However, because fish have the potential to accumulate water pollutants, not all fish are as safe to eat as the trout that are raised in hatcheries.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) remind those who eat the fish they catch of a few simple tips for reducing exposures to contaminants in fish:

DO:

- Fish in different places to vary your diet.
- Choose smaller fish to eat.
- Choose stocked trout, sunfish or similar fish to eat.
- Check the HEALTH website at www.health.state.ri.us to find fish with low mercury levels.

In addition to this advice for choosing the safest fish to eat, HEALTH has issued several advisories concerning fish which have accumulated unsafe levels of contaminants.

Advisories:

- Do not eat any fish from the Woonasquatucket River below the Smithfield line.
- Do not eat bass from the Quidnick Reservoir
- Eat no more than one meal per month of the following saltwater fish: striped bass, bluefish, swordfish and shark. .

*For better health, HEALTH recommends a low-fat diet including grains, fruits, vegetables and lowfat dairy products, with smaller amounts of high protein foods like fish, shellfish and meat. For information on shellfish, call 1-800-256-6500 or check the shellfish closure map on the Providence Journal weather page or the DEM website.

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

~~ Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities ~~

Rhode Island Addendum to

"SHOULD I EAT THE FISH I CATCH"

This pamphlet is for people who enjoy the benefits of catching and eating fish. Fish can be part of a healthy diet, but some fish may be contaminated with unsafe levels of chemicals.* To reduce exposures to chemical contaminants, the RI Department of Health recommends:

- **Fish in different places to vary your diet.** Contaminant levels are different for each pond or river and each type of fish.
- **Choose smaller fish to eat.** Fish accumulate contaminants as they grow.
- **Choose stocked trout, which are raised in hatcheries, or sunfish and similar fish to eat.** Freshwater bass, pickerel, pike and yellow perch generally have higher levels of mercury than sunfish and similar fish.

Only a small number of RI fish have been tested for contaminants. These tests, along with more thorough testing across New England, show that fish can contain unsafe levels of mercury, dioxins and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). Based on these test results, the Department of Health issued the following advisories:

Do not eat any fish from the Woonasquatucket River below Smithfield due to dioxin, PCB, and mercury contamination.

Do not eat bass from Quidnick Reservoir due to mercury contamination.

Limit consumption of the following fish to one meal per month:

- **striped bass and bluefish** (PCBs),
- **swordfish and shark** (mercury).

Mercury is a fish contaminant of special concern. At toxic levels, mercury impairs development during pregnancy and childhood, and affects kidney function in adults.

The highest mercury levels found in bass, yellow perch and bluegill sunfish are listed below for 18 RI waters. These levels cannot be used to rank RI waters because only a small number of fish were tested at each location. Of the nine other species of fish tested, only chain pickerel had levels of mercury above 0.5 ppm.

The following tips for reducing mercury exposures are especially important for people who eat fish more than once per week or women who eat fish during or just prior to pregnancy:

- Choose fish and ponds that test low in mercury,
- Choose smaller fish to eat, and,
- Vary your diet by fishing in different spots & eating different types of fish.

**For a healthy diet, the RI Department of Health recommends a diet of mostly grains, fruits, vegetables*

and low fat foods, with smaller amounts of high protein foods like fish or shellfish. For information on shellfish, call 1-800-256-6500 or check the shellfish closure area map on the Providence Journal weather page.

Body of water	Bass	Yellow Perch	bluegill
Blackstone River**	0.1	0.08	0.04
Bowdish Reservoir	**1.0***		
Curran Res. - upper	0.7	0.3	0.3
Flat River	0.2	0.2	0.14
Hundred Acre Pond	**1.1***	0.4	0.2
Larkin Pond	0.9	0.4	0.4
Mashpaug	0.1		0.04
Mishnock	0.2		0.06
Oak Swamp	0.5		0.16
Quidnick Reservoir	**1.3**	0.8	0.6
Pawtuxet River**	0.2		0.2
Simmons Res.-upper	0.6	0.06	
Tarbox Pond	0.3	0.3	
Tiogue	0.2	0.08	0.14
Tucker	**1.0***	0.6	
Turner	0.11	0.08	0.04
Woonasquatucket			0.16
Yawgoo Pond	**1.1***	**1.2***	0.3

* only one fish tested with levels above 1 ppm.
** only one sample tested; data may not be representative of the whole river.
Bold values exceed FDA limit of 1 part per million (1 ppm).
Advisories are issued in RI when 30% of fish tested exceed this value.

return to Fish Advisory Press Release 04/06/2000

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what's the perfect gift to say ...

From the pages of The Providence Journal

4.17.2000 00:01:31

5 firms facing cleanup order

▪ n The Environmental Protection Agency, which found high levels of dioxin along the Woonasquatucket River more than a year ago, orders companies it holds responsible to complete some unfinished work.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The Environmental Protection Agency last week stepped up its pressure on five companies it holds responsible for the contamination of the Woonasquatucket River.

The agency, which found high levels of dioxin along the river more than a year ago and has taken preliminary measures to prevent contaminants from spreading, has ordered the companies to complete some unfinished work.

The companies -- former manufacturers along the river as well as current property owners -- have refused previous agency requests to contribute to the cleanup of the Centredale site.

``It is unfortunate that EPA has to issue a unilateral order, but these parties have declined to perform these important public health measures voluntarily," Mindy S. Lubber, EPA's New England administrator, said in a statement.

``This order requires the private parties to step up to the plate and contribute to this complex undertaking. This cleanup should not have to rely solely on taxpayer dollars."

The agency has spent $2 million to conduct sampling in and along the river, to fence and otherlwise limit access to the area and to cap contaminated soil south of the Centredale Manor parking lot. The cap, topped with greenery, protects people and wildlife from exposure to the contaminants, and keeps the contaminants from washing downstream.

Agency cleanup crews last fall nearly finished capping a second area between Centredale Manor and Brook Village. The five companies have been ordered to submit a plan to complete the job by early next month and to begin the work by the middle of next month. The job entails finishing the cap and installing flood-control measures.

The companies are Crown Metro, Emhart Industries and New England Container Co., all factories, and Brook Village Associates and Centredale Manor Associates, the owners of the two high-rise

apartment complexes at the site.

Notices went out to the companies on Wednesday. They have 10 days to respond.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, who serves on a committee of community leaders that advises the federal agency on the Woonasquatucket site, said it is his understanding that the order won't interfere with his two primary goals: ``continuing to move forward at a rapid pace" on the river cleanup and protecting the quality of life of tenants at the two elderly complexes.

``I have been assured that is the case," he said.

Agency officials said they appreciate the cooperation they have received from Brook Village and Centredale Manor, but the owners, along with New England Container, ``have repeatedly declined to perform work on their properties."

Crown Metro and Emhart -- successors of Metro-Atlantic, the company that manufactured chemicals on the site into the early 1970s -- were identified as ``potential responsible parties" only recently. But they too have declined to participate in the cleanup, according to the agency.

EPA spokeswoman Angela Bonarrigo said unilateral orders are commonly used at Superfund sites when companies being held responsible for contamination refuse to participate in cleanups voluntarily. There are penalties for not complying with the order, she said, although she could not immediately say what they were.

If the companies ignore the order, the agency can finish the cleanup on its own and go to court to seek reimbursement for the clean-up costs from the companies.

The work undertaken at the river so far is mostly temporary. Later this year, the results of a $200,000 study on exactly how to clean up the property will be made public. According to preliminary figures, it could cost $3 million to $6 million to remove soil near the apartment buildings and an additional $5 million to $10 million to address the contaminants in the river sediments.

Add [redacted] on this topic

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EPA - New England Daily News Clips

Tuesday, January 18, 2000

Providence Journal 1/17/00

Chafee shown river cleanup won't come cheap

▪ Saying "seeing is believing," EPA officials and local politicians make it clear that dioxin-containment measures taken so far are temporary.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Just minutes after Lincoln Chafee's appointment to his late father's U.S. Senate seat, state Sen. John Celona ran into a State House office and banged out a letter inviting Chafee to tour the proposed Superfund site on the Woonasquatucket River.

The North Providence Democrat had frequently contacted the late Sen. John H. Chafee with his concerns about testing and cleaning the waterway and protecting the values of abutting properties.

On Friday, his efforts paid off when the new senator took Celona up on his invitation by joining him and an entourage of officials from the Environmental Protection Agency on a tour of the contaminated banks of the Woonasquatucket. Given Celona's reputation for being a tireless legislator, he got a laugh from the group when he related how he quickly he had written Chafee.

Celona said yesterday that he was pleased by Chafee's briefing on the river, particularly since the new senator has followed in his father's footsteps by landing an important environmental position, chairman of a subcommittee on the Superfund program.

``It worked out very well," Celona said. ``We wanted to keep our newest senator up on it. ... Seeing is believing in an issue like this."

More

Chafee shown river.. continued

Providence Journal
1/18/00

During the morning tour, EPA officials said they were spending about $1.5 million capping and fencing off sections of the Woonasquatucket where tests last year detected dangerous levels of dioxins and volatile organic compounds in river sediments. But the measures, which will be completed this summer, are only temporary, according to EPA on-scene coordinator Ted Bazenas, who expects the area to be formally designated a Superfund site in about a week. Bazenas said the earthen caps placed over the contaminated sediments are not meant to withstand erosion after five years. They must either be made permanent or some other measures must be undertaken to remove or prevent the spread of the contaminants, he said.

That will cost significantly more money -- no one went so far as to estimate how much -- and that's the message EPA officials, Celona and Mayor A. Ralph Mollis wanted to send Chafee.

``It's going to take substantial resources to bring that project over the finish line," said Mindy Lubber, the EPA's newly appointed acting regional administrator to Rhode Island, who accompanied Chafee on the tour.

Mollis emphasized that ``without funding, obviously, Superfund designation would be a con rather than a pro." He said the Woonasquatucket should be given high priority because it flows into Providence, ``where a Renaissance is taking place," and because it has been given federal designation as an ``American Heritage River."

The pollution, Mollis said, ``requires immediate national attention" given that the president and Congress ``think this river is important." In response to a question from Chafee, the mayor said the EPA has done a satisfactory job so far.

The goal now, he said, is to dedicate enough funds to the cleanup to ``bring the river back to being an extremely valuable resource," one used for boating, fishing, walking and more.

Lubber praised the role of a ``management action committee," which was formed by the EPA in an effort to unite the efforts of agency officials and community leaders.

``We are making decisions that work for the people," she said.

More

Chafee shown river ... continued

Providence Journal
1/18/00

Two residents who live along the river had nothing but praise for the EPA when Chafee paid an agency-arranged visit to their home on Steere Avenue. Paulette and Don Nabor said they were upset by the news of the river contamination because many years ago they bought their house, with its views of the river, thinking that they had a found a country setting in a city.

But the EPA has worked hard to keep them informed of the cleanup work and has welcomed their desire to plant trees in areas that have been dug up by contractors. The fencing, they added, has helped keep away people who were ignoring warnings about the river, including fishermen and children who like to catch turtles and crawfish.

From the pages of The Providence Journal
Rhode Island MONTHLY
credit union Central Falls

GO TO: [Local News Section] [More Community Stories] POST TO:

8.19.99 07:34:23

Town: River warrants Superfund designation

▪ n Mayor A. Ralph Mollis has asked Governor Almond to support the EPA designation, which would make the Woonasquatucket River and other dioxin-contaminated areas eligible for federal cleanup funds.

By MELANIE LEFKOWITZ
Journal Staff Writer
Superfund
status sought
for tainted river

By MELANIE LEFKOWITZ
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The town will support a recommendation to designate the dioxin-contaminated Woonasquatucket River as a federal Superfund site, Mayor A. Ralph Mollis has announced.

During a meeting yesterday of the Management Action Committee, a group concerned with the dioxin contamination, Mollis said that the Superfund designation, which has been urged by the Environmental Protection Agency, has the community's support.

The committee has proposed that the site be named the Centredale Manor Restoration Superfund Site, Mollis said.

Although the name refers to Centredale Manor, where some of the largest concentrations of dioxin have been found and where the pollution might have originated, the high-priority designation will also encompass the contamination in the river itself.

Superfund is an EPA term indicating that a site is on the National Priorities List for federal cleanup funding. Sites are selected on the basis of the degree of risk they pose to human health and the environment, among other factors. Between 2,500 and 2,600 places in the United States are on the National Priorities List, officials said. They include 12 Superfund sites in Rhode Island.

EPA officials have said they believe that the situation along the Woonasquatucket River merits this designation.

The EPA needs state and local approval before it can put a site on the Superfund list. Mollis delivered a letter to Governor Almond's staff yesterday expressing the town's support for the designation and asking the governor to send a letter to the EPA in support of the listing.

After EPA officials receive approval and assurance that the river and its banks meet the agency's specifications for Superfund, the listing is subject to a 60-day public-comment period, said Richard Boynton of the EPA, co-chairman of the Management Action Committee with Mollis.

Boynton said he believes the site could be placed on the National Priorities List as early as January.

``Once it goes on the National Priorities List, that means it's on top of the heap for funding," he said. ``It frees up funds to work on the site until it's cleaned up."

Mollis said the money is the primary reason the town decided to support the Superfund designation.

``The only possibility for funding for complete restoration is to have this site listed on the Superfund list," Mollis said. ``We were being very cautious to make sure we're going in the right direction."

The mayor said town officials spoke with other communities about their experiences with Superfund sites before reaching a decision.

``We've done a great deal of research, and any community that has had a Superfund listing said their experience so far has been very positive," Mollis said. ``This is a positive step that will help us make this a better river than it was five years ago."

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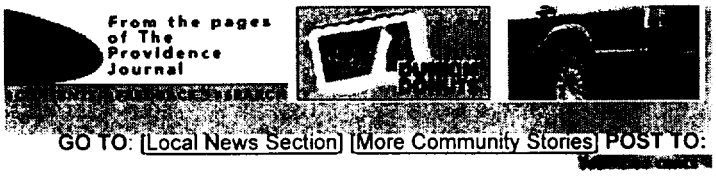

7.29.99 07:25:27

The stigma of dioxin

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Anthony Campanelli loves his neighborhood, says there's no place better. People here look out for each other.

But he and his wife are getting older and he's thought about moving to a smaller place, maybe even a condo in Florida. And now there's a problem. A real-estate company told him the dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River -- which flows up to his back yard -- could lower the value of his house by as much as a third.

As with his neighbors, Campanelli's home is his big investment. He built it 31 years ago, spent the next 30 years paying it off and can't afford to take that big a hit.

``Maybe five years down the road I might be able to sell, but I might be dead five years from now," Campanelli says.

``Would you buy a house on the water that had dioxin? The minute they hear Woonasquatucket, right away they'll back off."

Twenty, thirty years ago, the Woonasquatucket River was probably polluted with dioxin. But the people who lived in neighborhoods along the river, who thought it was nice that their children could play near its waters, didn't know it.

They know it now.

In January, the Environmental Protection Agency said dangerous levels of the cancer-causing chemical had been found at several spots along the river. Since then they have been scooping hundreds of soil samples from a mile stretch along the river to test for further evidence of contamination. The new sampling will tell the EPA how extensive a cleanup is needed, or whether one is needed at all.

The agency has said the pollution is not too bad, that the worst of it is probably contained to the property of a housing complex for the elderly and that the

contamination presents little serious risk to people, so long as they don't eat the fish.

That has been little comfort to people like the Campanellis who live near the river. While their health may not be at risk, they say, their property certainly is.

There is no way of knowing whether property values around the river will suffer any long-term effects from the contamination and the EPA investigation.

But in many communities where long-hidden pollution has been discovered, property values have dropped and neighborhoods have been stigmatized. They can rebound in time; but recovery, experts say, depends on how federal and local officials handle the investigation and the cleanup.

``What really matters is the people's perceptions, not the scientists' perceptions," says Jill McCluskey, a natural-resources professor at Washington State University who has studied the stigmas associated with environmental contamination. ``That's what affects property values, people's perception of risk."

John DeVillars, administrator of the EPA's New England office, sympathizes with residents who live along the river. ``It's kind of hard to sell your house if there's PCBs or dioxins in your front yard," he said earlier this year during a meeting with Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy.

Homeowners in places such as Pittsfield, Mass., where an EPA river cleanup is under way, have similar problems, DeVillars said. But, he adds, Superfund laws do not have any provisions for compensating homeowners for a drop in property values.

The long-term goal on the Woonasquatucket, DeVillars says, is to pinpoint the source of the contamination, clean it up and return a sense of security to the area. That is the plan, though no one knows how long it will take.

Work crews are now taking more samples at Centredale Manor, the housing complex for the elderly built on the site of an old chemical and barrel cleaning company. Environmental officials believe the dioxin originated here, possibly leaking from buried drums. Dozens of barrels were dug up in the early 1980s and there may be more, according to recent metal-detecting tests.

The highest dioxin readings have come from the Centredale Manor property. The chemical has flowed downstream, settling in the sediment and piling up

behind dams. Environmental officials do not yet know how much dioxin, if any, is in the back yards of people living along the river.

The EPA is still deciding whether to put the area on its national priority list for cleanup under Superfund aws. The site technically qualifies for placement on the list, based on a scoring method that considers everything from the level of contamination to possible health risks. While a cleanup can still take place without the designation, being a national priority puts a polluted area on the fast track for cleanup and makes more federal funds available.

But there is a downside -- the ``Superfund'' label can carry a heavy stigma. The word sticks in peoples' minds, identifying an area as contaminated.

``People with alternative choices don't pick the place that has the real contamination or, in some cases, the perceived contamination,'' says Michael Greenberg, an environmental policy professor at Rutgers University who has studied property values near 200 Superfund sites on the east coast. ``People are just very, very worried about investing their life savings down the street from something that is frightening.

``There are some people who, even if it's completely safe, say `I'm not going to live here anymore.' They sell it at a highly discounted rate. The persons that move in are going to be of a lower socioeconomic status.

``But, if the site becomes fully cleaned up, fully remediated, it can bounce back again.''

``That requires a pretty major effort,'' Greenberg says. ``It can happen, and I have seen it happen.''

Realtor William Friedman doesn't believe the dioxin contamination is a serious health risk, but he says it has affected the market in the area. He has been selling real estate for 20 years and now works at the REMAX office on Mineral Spring Avenue.

``Even if there's nothing wrong, the damage is done when the news comes out,'' he says. ``The only thing that can cure a stigma is tear it down and rebuild it or let it be forgotten and go away.''

Friedman estimates houses in some areas near the Woonasquatucket have lost 15 percent of their value.

``For some people, that's their entire equity,'' Friedman says. If someone bought a house five years ago for $85,000 and still owes $80,000, he'll lose money on the sale. ``He's what we call upside down,'' Friedman

says. ``He owes more than it's worth."

Friedman has already seen one sale fall through. A man who was going to buy a condo unit at the Mill at Allendale pulled out of his contract when he heard about the dioxin. ``He just didn't want to get involved with it," Friedman says. The man had been going through another real-estate agent for the condo, but came to Friedman to see other property.

Others who have come to ReMax looking for houses have made it clear they don't want anything near the Woonasquatucket. ``If they have little kids, they get nervous," Friedman says.

Areas can be stigmatized for reasons other than pollution. Friedman cites the Buttonwoods area of Warwick, where convicted murderer Craig Price killed four of his neighbors. ``Nobody would go near that area, even though he was in jail," Friedman says. ``That was an impossible area to sell for a while.

The area around the state landfill in Johnston is the same, Friedman said. And Johnston residents on Irons Avenue experienced similar problems in recent years when an asphalt plant opened in their neighborhoods. Many people complained their homes had lost value. After a long court battle, the company agreed to move out of the neighborhood.

The most notorious example of a stigmatized neighborhood is Love Canal, outside Buffalo, N.Y., built on a former dumping ground laced with dozens of chemicals.

Lois Gibbs lived there before taking a government buyout in 1980. Like many others in her neighborhood, she became educated in pollution issues by fighting with government agencies. She now runs the Center for Environment and Justice in Virginia, which consults communities battling environmental contamination.

``Poison is poison is poison. It's very hard for people to conceptualize what one part per billion is," Gibbs says, referring to the increments in which dioxin contamination is measured. ``It's outside of their normal understanding. But people do understand that dioxin is one of the most toxic chemicals known to man, and they just don't want any of it near them. It's a very human reaction, and a fair reaction, especially if you have children.

``People understand that they make choices about getting in their car or smoking cigarettes. But this is not about voluntary choices," she says. ``They may smoke a cigarette, but they wouldn't give it to their

child."

When the high dioxin levels were announced in January, people reacted with panic. Parents wanted to know if it was safe for their children to go outside, if vegetables from gardens were contaminated, if the drinking water was polluted.

Most of these concerns were addressed within a few days by a team of federal and local officials who staffed a hot line, held public meetings and eventually canvassed neighborhoods with leaflets. But some fears were harder to calm.

Some Little League parents voted not to use a field along the river, despite assurances from the EPA that early tests showed the field to be safe. After meeting with Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, the league said it would use the field, as long as the EPA guaranteed it was safe.

The Providence School Department last spring ruled out its preferred site for building two new schools because the land borders the river, even though the EPA said the threat to areas in Providence is minimal. School officials said they couldn't take the risk.

Bill Sgambato has felt the sting of speculation and rumor. He lives near the river, across the street from Campanelli, and he owns the Yacht Club Bottling Works in Centredale.

After the dioxin investigation began in January, the EPA announced it would be testing the water in two nearby wells: a Johnston nursery school and the Yacht Club. And, overnight, Sgambato's business plummeted.

On good days, he had been selling 300 gallons of water, but the day after the EPA announcement -- spread by TV and newspapers -- he sold 57 gallons.

Sales stayed that way for months, even though the EPA tested the water, found no problems, and made repeated announcements that Yacht Club products are safe.

``Bad news travels fast," Sgambato says. ``Good news, people just disregard it."

Business at the 84-year-old company is better now. In March, Rep. Kennedy, state Sen. John Celona, Mayor Mollis and other town officials toured the bottling company and sampled the soda to ensure people the products were safe.

That helped a lot, Sgambato says, as did a Cox Cable

show about the company that aired regularly for several weeks.

Old customers, scared away for months, are still trickling back in and new customers show up each day.

``On the whole, I think it will help us, the extra publicity," Sgambato says. ``We're going to be better than we were eight months ago, but it was a rough road getting here."

And in the neighborhood, Sgambato says, people aren't as worried about the dioxin these days.

But Campanelli says homeowers are still concerned about property values. He wants to band together with other waterfront homeowners. With their numbers to support them, he says, they will march into Town Hall and say they want a reduction in their property taxes until the river is cleaned up.

``Why should you have to pay if you have hazardous waste in your back yard?"

His next-door neighbor Mary McCoy has the same concern. ``I don't have any intentions of selling my house," she says, ``but we're paying taxes on the full value."

Mollis says residents have come to him with these complaints and he has told them that in the end, after the area is cleaned up, everything will work out.

``In the long run, it will probably increase the values of these homes more than anything else," Mollis said.

Throughout the dioxin investigation, Mollis has been emphatic that the river be cleaned up and made a resource for the community. In the past the river wasn't ``as desirable" as it could have been, he says. But he insists the river's condition will improve in coming years, in turn improving nearby neighborhoods.

``Five years down the road, they may be abutting a river that has canoes and kayaks, bike paths and recreational fishing," Mollis said. ``I have the utmost compassion for people abutting the river today. But I also want to say that if I was a homeowner on the Woonasquatucket river today, I wouldn't be looking at this in a negative fashion."

Kim Rose is hoping for the best. She and her 3-year-old son moved into a small house near the river in January, a few days after the EPA announced the heightened level of dioxin.

By the time she had heard about the contamination, it was too late to use the dioxin as a bargaining chip in the purchase of her house, she says. ``Everything was all settled with the price," she says. ``I thought, `Oh God, what if I ever do want to sell the house?' "

She called the EPA and was assured that the contamination was limited to the river banks and that she and her son were not in danger. Her real-estate agent told her the property value would be fine once the pollution is cleaned up.

Rose came here to be near family and says she doesn't have any plans to move. ``I'm pretty much here forever."

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6.17.99 07:12:42

Final health report shows little risk from dioxin in river

▪ The federal agency that issued the report, however, could not say whether residents along Woonasquatucket are at risk in their back yards.

By BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- There are no widespread health risks from dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River, according to a final health report released by a federal agency yesterday.

Officials at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) continue to caution against eating fish from the river and recommend that exposure to the river be limited. But they said most people have nothing to worry about, even if they occasionally go near or in the river.

The agency, however, could not say whether people living along the river are at risk in their back yards.

``Is it safe to say they shouldn't have any gatherings, any cookouts?" asked Town Councilman John Sisto Jr. ``What do they do?"

``We don't know because it hasn't been tested," said Dr. Kenneth Orloff, a toxicologist who wrote much of the health report. ``We know [the dioxin] has gone down the river because we can find it in the sediment. What we don't know is whether flooding in the river has deposited it along the banks."

Soil samples taken in February near houses along the river showed troublesome dioxin levels. Those spots have been fenced off. Samples will be taken near more houses in July, said Dick Boynton, of the Environmental Protection Agency.

``Our main objective at this point is to keep people away from those areas contaminated with dioxin," Boynton said.

Permanent fencing is being installed along the river at Centredale Manor, a housing complex for the elderly where the highest dioxin levels have been found. Fences were also erected behind the Lee Romano Little League field this spring to appease parents worried about their children's safety. There were no

signs of dioxin contamination on the field.

The new health report also recommends that dioxin contamination be contained or removed to prevent it from spreading.

Next month, EPA crews will begin digging test pits on the Centredale Manor property to search for barrels that may have been buried years ago.
Ground-penetrating radar tests showed several buried objects, Boynton said.

Before Centredale Manor was built, the property was occupied by a chemical plant and a barrel-cleaning plant. In the early 1980s, environmental officials dug up dozens of metal drums at the site. They expect to find more when they begin digging in earnest this fall.

The Centredale Manor property is the most contaminated so far, and federal officials believe the dioxin originated there.

But other contamination sources are possible, ``given the history of industrial use along the Woonasquatucket," Orloff said.

For the last several months, a team of EPA investigators has been scouring public records and talking to former factory employees, searching for whoever or whatever might have polluted the river.

After high dioxin levels were found in river sediment in January, ATSDR was called in to assess the public health risk from the cancer-causing chemical. At a Town Hall press conference, the findings were presented by a five-member team from ATSDR, including Orloff, a physician, an environmental scientist and two community health experts. They will be at the Town Hall again today from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. to address concerns about dioxin. The health report will be available.

The EPA was first alerted to the contamination in 1996, when a community group heard that Southeast Asians were using the river for subsistence fishing. Tests showed dangerous levels of dioxin in eels and sunfish pulled from the river. Subsequent tests showed contamination in river sediment from Centredale Manor into Providence.

The fishing advisory issued in 1996 will remain in effect until dioxin levels in the fish are safe for consumption.

The most immediate health risk, however, is from fecal bacteria that flows into the river when sewers overflow during heavy rainstorms.

Copies of the health consulation are available at the Mayor Salvatore Mancini Union Free Library, 1810 Minderal Spring Ave. in North Providence, and the Marian J. Mohr Library, 1 Memorial Ave., in Johnston.

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From the pages of The Providence Journal
CVS pharmacy building

6.3.99 07:13:32

EPA sleuths track dioxin contamination leads

▪ n The Environmental Protection Agency identifies businesses operating on the Centredale Manor property from the 1930s through the late 1970s.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Poring over musty records and prying skeletons from closets, federal Superfund investigators trying to pinpoint dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River seem more like gumshoes than environmentalists.

They sift through Town Hall journals and hunt down people who might know something about questionable activities from long ago. They even call on the anonymous tipster, though they are using a toll-free hotline rather than back-alley meetings with informants.

The Environmental Protection Agency is asking anyone with information about the business practices of companies formerly located on the Centredale Manor property to call 1-888-372-7341 and share their knowledge.

A few people have called already with tips, said Catherine Garypie, senior enforcement counsel for the agency. In the meantime, investigators have tracked down businesses that operated on the property from the 1930s through the late 1970s.

Sometimes a state agency that has already investigated a site refers a case to the agency. At other times, as in the case of dioxin in the Woonasquatucket, the agency is armed only with test results showing an area is contaminated.

Agency investigators often start with a title search, sketching a map of ownership. At the Centredale Manor site, the search went back to 1930.

With the names of several companies and business owners, the investigators scour state records in a search for documents the businesses have filed, such as officers and parent corporations.

Information requests are sent to the companies or former employees, asking detailed questions about

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business practices at the site -- what kind of chemicals were manufactured, how and where were they disposed of, does the company have money to pay for a cleanup?

About 15 such requests have been sent to businesses associated with the Centredale Manor site.

The recipients are required by federal law to tell the truth.

``It's pretty serious," Garypie said.

Under Superfund laws, there are four categories of responsible parties: the current owner or operator; the owner or operator at the time of disposal; the company that generated the waste found at the site and the company that transported the waste to the site.

Not all the responsible parties have to be found for the agency to collect money for a cleanup. If two companies contaminated a site with mercury, Garypie said, and only the second company can be found, that company can be liable for all the cleanup cost, even if it contributed only 10 percent of the mercury.

``The harm caused by each company can't really be differentiated because there's just one hazardous material at the site," Garypie said.

While this approach allows the agency to collect money, it has been criticized as unfair, putting a disproportionate burden on businesses responsible for only part of the problem.

The agency has responded by revamping the process, Garypie said.

``The liability scheme comes across as harsh," she said. ``What we've done is insert fairness into the process. We're doing different creative things to make the statute a little more fair."

If a responsible company can't be found, the agency will sometimes pay that portion of the cleanup. The agency will also enter into agreements with small companies so they can pay for part of the cleanup without hiring a team of lawyers to negotiate with the agency.

Sometimes the responses to the information requests are enough for the agency to identify liable parties, Garypie said. In such cases, a letter is sent to the company or business owner, inviting them to help pay for a cleanup of the site, done to agency specifications. Garypie said the agency will sometimes conduct a cleanup, then bill the liable groups.

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If a party does not cooperate, the agency can issue an administrative order, demanding that they participate in the cleanup. If they do not comply with the order, parties can be fined up to $27,000 a day through a court order.

So far, no notices have been sent to businesses or individuals formerly involved with the Centredale Manor property.

The investigators are hoping to bolster their case with information gleaned through the tip line. The approach has been used several times in other communities, often with success.

Garypie cites an investigation she conducted in New Jersey while working in the agency's New York office.

A group of artists had purchased an old factory and worked to convert it into condominiums and work space. Everything seemed fine with the building, vacant for many years. But the last person to renovate his living space tore up the floorboards and found a large amount of liquid mercury.

The tenants were relocated. The agency began an investigation and found that several companies operated at the site between 1910 and 1965. Some of the companies had gone out of business and many did not keep detailed records.

It used to be common practice, Garypie said, for businesses to discard records after five or ten years.

Garypie and agency investigators ran an advertisement in a local paper asking former employees of the companies to come forward with information. Several did, and were interviewed in the presence of a court reporter.

Petitioning old employees for help, Garypie said, ``was very helpful in that case."

With the depositions, the agency issued notices to General Electric and two other companies that had smaller roles in the contamination. General Electric is complying with the administrative order and cleaning up the area, which was declared a Superfund site, Garypie said.

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3.26.99 07:10:38

Tests confirm dioxin presence

▪ n The latest results are ``not a new cause for alarm'' and no additional measures are needed to ensure public safety, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

By THOMAS J. MORGAN
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Another round of surface-soil testing on the banks of the Woonasquatucket River in Centredale has confirmed earlier findings of contamination by dioxins exceeding, in some spots, the ``action level'' concentration defined by the Environmental Protection Agency, the agency said yesterday.

``Not a new cause for alarm'' and ``not a surprise,'' agency spokesman Peyton Fleming said in summing up the results. He said the next step probably will be to take samples from deeper in the soil.

Also yesterday, Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy said from Washington that at his request the Army Corps of Engineers will inspect five dams on the Woonasquatucket next month. He said dioxin concentrations have been found behind each dam, and the dams are perhaps all that is keeping the dangerous chemical from washing farther downstream.

Kennedy said he will tour the dams April 19 with Col. Michael Pratt, the commanding officer of the New England division of the Corps, and with state and local officials.

The EPA ``action level'' is one part per billion [1 ppb], and the agency said it showed up in samples from three properties in the quarter-mile stretch of the river from Centredale Manor, a housing project for the elderly, to the Allendale Dam.

The Johnston side of the river got a clean bill of health.

The highest concentrations were found on the grounds of the manor, at an adjacent wetland and at the tailrace of the dam, Fleming said.

``The fact that we are seeing hits at the Centredale Manor and the wetland area is not a surprise at all,'' Fleming said. ``We knew from the beginning that we needed to collect samples from the floodplain areas immediately downstream.''

All the contaminated areas lie within the river's floodplain.

``We're getting a sense of how widespread the contamination is, with an eye toward whatever work we are going to do to remediate,'' said Fleming.

He said the latest findings do not support measures to ensure public safety beyond those already in place.

Environmental officials have erected warning signs and strung orange plastic fences along the riverbank -- stronger fences will be erected next month, the EPA said -- and have warned residents not to swim in the river or eat fish from it. The precautions apply only to the Centredale area and the parts immediately downstream.

The EPA spokesman said 240 samples were scraped from the surface in February, and yesterday's findings were based on the first 86 to be tested. Work continues on the remainder, he said.

John P. DeVillars, EPA New England administrator, said, ``We need to continue our focus on floodplain properties, especially those above Allendale Dam."

Fleming said that, if other test results show concentrations greater than 1 ppb, ``it triggers the need to look at what sort of steps need to be taken."

He said that the numbers would have to be ``very, very high" to justify digging up the soil and sediments and disposing of them in an approved manner.

``These numbers are preliminary," he said. ``It's too early to talk about specific numbers. The numbers we are seeing in some of these [test results] are are very consistent with the numbers seen previously."

Sen. Jack Reed issued a statement from Washington in which he noted that the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease has recommended that the EPA remediate surface soil contaminated by dioxin exceeding 1 ppb.

``I would also hope that the EPA will begin plans for remediation in any areas where final results indicate high dioxin levels," Reed said.

Kennedy said his concern is for the structural integrity of the dams. He said he sought the help of the Corps on March 18 after learning that a visual inspection by the state Department of Environmental Management showed three of them were in need of immediate repair.

``We also need to discuss with state and local officials how the federal government can be of assistance in light of the fact that the ownership of the dams is uncertain and that the state has yet to make a thorough inspection of the dams," the congressman said.

The EPA said that anyone with health-related questions about dioxin contamination should call the Family Health Information Line at the Rhode Island Department of Health. The toll-free number is 1-800-942-7434.

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3.19.2000 00:04:49

Early estimate of river cleanup shows cost might hit $16 million

▪ The Environmental Protection Agency also identifies two more companies it will ask to help pay for cleaning the Woonasquatucket River.

By RICHARD SALIT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Cleaning up a contaminated stretch of the Woonasquatucket River could cost as much as $16 million, according to preliminary estimates. But officials at the federal Environmental Protection Agency caution that more reliable figures won't be available until a decision is rendered late this year on exactly how to conduct the cleanup.

Meanwhile, the EPA is pursuing two additional companies to undertake or help pay for the cleanup of the property, bringing the number of so-called ``potential responsible parties" to five.

None of the companies has yet indicated a willingness to participate, according to EPA official Ted Bazenas.

``So far, no one has agreed to do any work. Negotiations have failed at this time," Bazenas said. ``We will continue to try and get them active in the cleanup of the site."

Because the river was designated a national Superfund site last month, financing won't be an impediment to the cleanup. Superfund designation makes the project eligible for federal money.

``Without any support from them, EPA will fund as much of the cleanup as we can," said Bazenas, adding that the agency can seek to recover cleanup costs through the courts.

A year ago, soil samples taken by the EPA revealed high levels of potentially cancer-causing dioxin near Centredale Manor and Brook Village, a pair of high-rise apartment complexes. Further testing revealed the presence of volatile organic compounds. Chain-link fencing was installed to prevent access to the contaminated areas and the public was warned not to use the river for fishing or bathing.

The property was once used for chemical manufacturing and drum reconditioning.

``Evidence suggests that the operations of the chemical company and the drum reconditioning facility at the site included disposal of wastes from the facilities on-site into the soil and directly into the Woonasquatucket River and resulted in releases and threats of

releases of hazardous substances," according to an EPA memorandum. ``Disposal also may have occurred during the construction of the two apartment buildings at the site."

The EPA originally notified three companies that they were potentially liable for the cleanup: New England Container Corp., the drum reconditioning outfit, and the developers of the two apartment complexes, Centerdale Manor Associates and Brook Village Associates.

Just a few weeks ago, five months after those notifications, the EPA sent additional notices to Crown-Metro Inc. and Emhart Industries, the successors of Metro-Atlantic, the company that manufactured chemicals on the site into the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, the EPA has awarded a $200,000 contract to study exactly how to clean the property. The results will be made public in the late summer or early fall, according to EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming. After the agency seeks public response to the study, he said, a decision on how to undertake the river cleanup will be made, most likely in the late fall or early winter.

According to preliminary figures, it could cost $3 million to $6 million to remove soil near the apartment buildings. It could cost an additional $5 million to $10 million to address the contaminants in the river sediments.

These figures, however, do not include any potential cleanup of the river beyond the Allendale Dam, which is in disrepair and may have allowed contaminants to spread downstream, Bazenas said. The preliminary estimates also do not include a permanent solution to the temporary caps the EPA placed over contaminated soils that were at risk of being washed into the river. The study will not examine solutions to these two problems, Bazenas said.

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Woonasquatucket dams pose a dilemma

■ Several that may be holding back dioxin-laced sediment may be in bad shape repair but for now, the state can only request that their owners make the repairs.

By ARIEL SABAR
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Pushing past a tangle of brush as he strode onto the snow-laced embankment of the Lymansville dam, Paul Guglielmino, the state's new dams inspector, didn't have to look far to find problems.

`` All this shouldn't be here," he said, waving a hand toward trees whose roots may be weakening a berm holding back about 7 million cubic feet of river water.

The problems at Lymansville -- too much vegetation, inoperable overflow gates, eroding embankments -- are not unique.

Guglielmino recently surveyed five dams on the Woonasquatucket River from southern Smithfield to Providence and found that three are in need of immediate repair. Dioxin-tainted sediment has been found behind those three, and the dams may be the only thing keeping dioxins and other pollutants from spreading downstream.

But with the ownership of these dams uncertain and legal limits on what steps the state can take to force repairs, fixing the problems may be tricky. Complicating matters is the fact that the last time the state inspected the three worst-rated dams was in the 1940s.

Guglielmino's report is a response to resolutions passed by the General Assembly in January amid concern about the discovery of the cancer-causing chemical dioxin along the river's North Providence stretch.

Lawmakers with districts downstream worried that a dam breach could release clouds of dioxin-tainted sediment into the river. They asked the state Department of Environmental Management to inspect the dams and develop ``an aggressive action plan" for immediate repairs.

In Guglielmino's survey, the Upper Esmond dam, in Smithfield, and Greystone dam, in North Providence and Johnston, earned ``good" ratings. Both were rebuilt this decade.

But Guglielmino gave the three others -- the Lymansville, Manton and Atlantic Mills dams -- mostly poor grades, citing broken gates, overflow channels clogged with rocks and dirt, and eroding embankments.

At Atlantic Mills, in Olneyville, he even spied a small leak in the stone face of the spillway.

The surveyed dams are relatively small, and a collapse would be unlikely to cause much property damage or injure anybody, other than perhaps a canoeist immediately downstream. Built to power the mills that once lined the river, most do little more now than hem in mucky ponds.

Water flows over the dams, but pollutants tend to get trapped in the river-bottom sediment behind them.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency announced in January that it had found some of the highest levels of dioxin behind Allendale dam, another dam on the Woonasquatucket -- one that breached several years

ago.

Earlier tests showed similarly worrisome levels behind Lymansville, and a much lesser amount behind Manton and Atlantic Mills.

State Sen. David V. Igliozzi, the sponsor of the Senate resolution and the instigator of the one in the House, said Guglielmino's report confirms his suspicions.

``The dams are in extremely bad repair,'' said Igliozzi, a Democrat whose district covers riverfront neighborhoods in Providence and Johnston. ``And I think repairs need to be done immediately, especially in the context of this potential further spread of dioxin downstream.''

But that may be harder than it seems.

Guglielmino and his employer, the Department of Environmental Management, which is in charge of dam inspections, do not yet know who owns the three troubled dams.

Another problem, the DEM says, is that it was unable to conduct a complete safety check of the dams.

Guglielmino made visual inspections of the dams over two days in January and February. But he said this week that he was unable to gather enough information to gauge the dams' structural soundness or even their overall safety.

To do so, he said, the dam's owners would need to clear away the brush and trees and lower the dam's water level to allow a fuller look at the structures that hold back water. ``We'll do the inspection if the dam is presented in a manner that we can do the inspection,'' he said.

Yet the state appears to be in a Catch-22: it says it cannot order the dam's owners to do those things unless it first determines the dams are unsafe.

A DEM official said the agency expects to clear up the ownership questions within a week. Then it will mail the owners letters that list recommended repairs. But because the DEM has seen no evidence that the dams are unsafe -- that is, at risk of imminent collapse -- the letters are recommendations, not orders.

That has prompted Igliozzi to accuse the agency of shirking its enforcement responsibilities. In an interview Tuesday, he pointed to a state law requiring the DEM to make periodic and ``thorough'' inspections of dams. Later that day, he wrote a letter of complaint to acting DEM director George Welly.

DEM spokesman Robert Ballou countered that the problems with the dams simply weren't dire enough to merit a brass-knuckled approach. ``From what we have observed, there are deficiencies that need to be addressed, but they are not of the magnitude or seriousness that would warrant immediate compliance orders,'' he said yesterday.

As for the claim by Guglielmino that the safety of the dams remains unknown, Ballou said that the letters to the owners are a first stab at fixing the problems, and that other measures may be considered if this approach fails.

He said that the dams weren't inspected since the 1940s because public officials hadn't asked for inspections and larger dams tooks took priority.

``Because they were low-hazard dams,'' he said, ``they were not among the priority dams that were primarily subject to the regular inspection program.''

Even routine inspections offer no guarantees.

In 1991, the Allendale Dam, an 8-foot-high dam on the Woonasquatucket in North Providence, collapsed. Earle Prout Jr., who was dam inspector then, said at the time that he had never seen any sign of trouble in at least a half-dozen inspections in the preceding 13 years.

A few years later, another dam on the river, the Dyerville dam, in Providence, also collapsed.

LYMANSVILLE DAM is impossible to see from the nearest road in North Providence.

But behind a sprawling mill complex, water glides over its edge in glassy sheets and plunges 14 feet to where the river resumes below. On a sunny afternoon earlier this week, the day after a storm draped Rhode Island in about a foot of snow, the spillway was one of the few features of the dam that seemed to be working, even if one side was partly covered in crude graffiti.

Guglielmino said that his report wasn't based on a rigorous examination of the dams but on signs of possible problems.

One sign is the rows of trees and bushes atop Lymansville. If they die or are felled by wind, Guglielmino explains, their roots will wither and thus threaten to undermine the carefully built earthen embankment. ``This should only be covered by grass," he said Tuesday during a visit to the dam.

Near the trees are overflow gates that are supposed to be opened during storms. They are designed to prevent surges of storm water from overrunning -- or, in the worst case, toppling -- the embankment.

But as Guglielmino approached, it was clear that these devices would be more at home in a museum of industrial history than on a working dam. The metal rack and pinion that lifts the gates is rusted to a purplish orange, and the wooden beams supporting them are splintered by rot.

Gazing over the rushing water, Guglielmino said there are still many unknowns, including whether the Lymansville spillway is brawny enough to withstand a large storm.

``I haven't performed enough of a visual inspection to say whether the dams are unsafe," he said. ``And that's the question everyone wants answered."

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3.11.99 07:13:21

EPA challenged on when dioxin data was known

▪ n The federal agency denies it stalled on releasing information and says results were released on the day they were received.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- A national watchdog group representing public employees wants to know why the Environmental Protection Agency waited until January to announce test results showing high levels of dioxin in soil along the Woonasquatucket River.

State Sen. John Celona, D-North Providence, sent a letter to the EPA yesterday asking the same question.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility contends the EPA could have made the announcement last fall, only releasing the information in January because The New York Times was writing a story on the river contamination.

``It's important to the citizens of Rhode Island to be able to expect honest, open and accountable government," said Todd Robins, general counsel for PEER. ``It's important for people to know if their leading environmental officials are telling the truth."

John P. DeVillars, administrator of the EPA's New England office, said the results were announced the very day they were received. In an earlier statement, DeVillars called PEER's allegation of a cover-up ``irrational and uninformed commentary."

After the EPA's January announcement, Robins asked for a detailed account of when exactly the agency knew the results of sampling done last September. But Robins said the information he received Monday from the EPA did not contain that data.

``If John DeVillars has nothing to hide, he has a funny way of showing it," Robins said.

The EPA flatly disputes PEER's allegations. Said Peyton Fleming, an EPA spokesman: ``We did not get those preliminary results until the morning of Jan. 12. The minute we got that data, the findings were such that we knew we had to respond immediately."

After hearing Robins did not receive the information he requested, Celona sent a letter to DeVillars asking the agency to release documents that would show how it handled soil samples taken along the river last fall.

``If they had the information, and they were sitting on it, then there are some serious, serious questions that need to be answered," Celona said.

Celona held a dioxin information meeting last August, after the state health department said dioxin levels in the Woonasquatucket posed an unacceptable cancer risk. EPA officials said more testing would be done in September, but results would not be available until March.

If the data had been released last fall, he said, ``it would have put us two months ahead of schedule," for a cleanup.

When Rep. Patrick Kennedy held a similar meeting in December for residents of Centredale Manor, he was told the same thing by EPA officials: test results would be released in the spring.

But the EPA announced the results Jan. 12, the day a New York Times reporter asked the EPA to comment on petitions being filed by PEER and Rhode Island Clean Water Action, alleging that the EPA was dragging its feet in addressing contamination in the Woonasquatucket.

The EPA said its announcement and The New York Times story were a coincidence.

Two days after the announcement, Robins filed his request under the Freedom of Information Act.

``I am very interested in seeing EPA documentation that will prove that was the first day that the regional administrator became aware of the preliminary soil-sample results," Robins said.

``What I did get back was a pile of press releases and public meeting results and very little else," he said. ``I received literally no documents dated between September 1998 and January 13, 1999."

If the results from the laboratory were delayed until January, Robins said, there should be some official documentation available.

Included in the packet from the EPA was a memo from last summer estimating that the results of tests planned for September would be available in one month.

Fleming said the results were delayed because the agency switched to a different laboratory. ``There are only a half-dozen laboratories in the country -- public and private -- that do this kind of work," he said.

``There was an expectation at one time that we would be able to turn them around in a month," Fleming said. But the first lab did not meet EPA's qualifications, forcing the agencies to send the samples to a Kansas company instead, Fleming said. The EPA has since switched to a North Carolina lab, which has been able to return preliminary test results from recent sampling in about a month.

Robins said he finds the explanation plausible, but wants evidence. ``If they're really was a backlog at the Kansas City lab, they ought to be able to prove that," Robins said. ``I know I was very clear about asking for documents that would prove that."

Robins said he spoke Tuesday with EPA officials who told him they would take a second look for the information he was requesting.

PEER was first contacted in 1998 by EPA employees concerned that the agency was not releasing results from sediment testing done in late 1997.

The results were released in July 1998.

Fleming acknowledges that preliminary results were available in early 1998, but said they were not announced because the samples were collected from the sediment behind dams along the river. ``There was no chance that the public could be exposed to those sediments," he said. ``That's why we waited until we had the finalized data."

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3.11.99 07:13:20

New report: No health risks

By BRIAN MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Dioxin contamination along the Woonasquatucket River does not pose wide-spread health risks, according to a federal report released yesterday.

The report, by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, echoes what is already known by the Environmental Protection Agency, and many of the recommended actions -- such as restricting access to contaminated areas -- have already been initiated.

While fish from the river should not be eaten and exposure to the river should be limited, the worst contamination is on the property of Centredale Manor and a drainage ditch behind the building, the report stated. Occasional exposure to even those most contaminated areas would not pose a significant health risk.

The agency recommended that all areas with dioxin levels above one part per billion should be cleaned up, presumably by having soil removed. So far, areas with those levels of the chemical are limited to the Centredale Manor property.

The Lee Romano Little League field and the North Providence Boys & Girls Club is also safe, the report stated. The Little League has said it will use the field for its upcoming season and the EPA has agreed to erect a fence separating the field from the riverbank to hinder access.

The report stated that flooding could contaminate property along the river. But a more immediate health risk, the agency said, is from fecal bacteria that enters the river when sewers overflow.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis said the report was reassuring. ``I'm comfortable with telling [residents] that the possibility of our children having any illnesses

associated with the contamination is extremely, extremely remote."

A 30-day period for public comment on the report began yesterday. When the comments are incorporated into the report and a final document is approved, it will be the official statement on health risks associated with the dioxin contamination.

Results from 240 soil samples collected along the river last month are expected by late May, said Ted Bazenas, the EPA's on-scene coordinator. Future testing will be based on those results and recommendations in the ATSDR report.

``We're also going to need to go further down," said EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming. ``You don't want to just scratch the surface and realize there's more contamination six or eight inches down."

But officials believe the most serious contamination is limited to the Centredale Manor property. ``At this point, we haven't identified any soil above the level of concern off the Centredale Manor area," Bazenas said.

Late this month EPA officials expect results from a geophysical test done last month to detect any metal barrels buried on the Centredale Manor property, which could be leaching chemicals into the ground. In the early 1980s, hundreds of buried barrels were removed from the property, which formerly housed a chemical company and a barrel-cleaning company.

It will be at least September before the EPA determines whether the Centredale Manor property should be considered for placement on the agency's national priority list for cleanup under superfund laws. The designation would fast-track cleanup and make additional money available for the project.

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EPA-New England Daily News Clips

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From the pages of The Providence Journal

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EPA reports `no risk' to children playing at Romano field

n Dioxin levels are well within safety levels, according to the latest reports, and most -- but not all -- parents are relieved.

By DRAKE WITHAM
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Play ball was the cry from committee members of the North Providence West Little League at a meeting last night at the Salvatore Mancini Union Free Library.

But despite ``good news" from the Environmental Protection Agency, not all parents are convinced that the Lee Romano field is safe for their children.

Romano field is located next to the Woonasquatucket River, which was found in January to have high levels of dioxin. The EPA becomes concerned when levels of dioxin are more than one part per billion. River sediment samples taken by the EPA near the field showed that dioxin levels were as high as 8 parts per billion.

But representatives of the EPA announced at last night's meeting that samples taken from the field in January are two parts per trillion.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, put that in laymen's terms last night by saying the levels were not likely to vary much from what would be found in his own backyard or other town ballfields.

``Am I jeopardizing my child by letting him or her play on the Lee Romano Field?" Mollis asked. ``The EPA is telling us the answer is a resounding `No.' "

Dick Boynton, project leader for the EPA said that the latest results were examined by the EPA, the state Department of Health and the Agency of Toxic Substances and Diseases Registry.

``Everyone was in agreement that there was no risk of children playing on the Little League field," Boynton said.

But not all the 40 or so parents in attendence last night were convinced. They pounded representatives from EPA, the Department of Health and the ATSDR with questions about how they could be sure the levels were safe, would there be further testing and whether there would be testing in other areas of town.

In response to the field's proximity to the river, Mollis gave the go ahead to build a 12-foot-high fence between the field and the river. At a cost of $5,000, Mollis said the town would pay for it if the EPA did not.

``I wanted to make sure that what they were shoving at us is true," said Henry Latagne, a parent of two girls who play fast-pitch softball on the field. ``I don't know if any level is safe."

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He and several other parents wanted other fields around town to be tested to see if comparable levels would be found there as estimated by the EPA. Only then, Latagne said, would he be comfortable having his daughters play on Romano field.

Boynton pointed out that the testing is very expensive, $1,200 per sample, and that tests are not generally done in areas not suspected of having high dioxin levels.

But state Sen. John Celona (D-North Providence) called for the testing to be done at other fields with part of the $1 million that the EPA has set aside to study and sample areas around the river.

``[Parents] demanded it and when they demand it the government has to respond," said John Vernancio, president of the North Providence West Little League.

It was not clear last night if the EPA would conduct tests on other ballfields in town but representatives did agree to provide more information about non-contaminated sites.

Vernancio said it was clear that fewer parents had signed their children up for Little League this year. Last year he said, 473 youngsters played in the league but as of last night, just 273 had registered. The season begins April 17.

But most parents last night seemed relieved with the latest results.

At a January meeting, parents voted not to use the field this year but that vote was unanimoulsy overturned last night.

``Tonight was extremely helpful, they gave us things in laymen's terms," said Maureen Fogarty, who has two children in the Little League. ``I'm going to let my children play on it."

The EPA started testing for dioxin in the Woonasquatucket in 1996 after it was learned people were eating fish from the river. In mid-January, the agency said high levels of dioxin had been found in the sediment and soil in several spots along the river, including the property of Centredale Manor, a housing complex for the elderly, where the highest levels were found.

A hot line is still being run through the state Department of Health. The number is 1-800-942-7434. The line operates weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Angela Bonarrigo

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Tuesday, February 15, 1999

The Providence Journal

EPA zeroing in on dioxin source

▪ The federal environment agency's testing along the Woonasquatucket River is a ``comprehensive, methodical" effort to locate the source of the pollution and to see whether the area qualifies as a Superfund site.

By ARIEL SABAR
Journal Staff Writer

Federal officials are expected today to begin their largest round of tests along the Woonasquatucket River since the disease-causing chemical dioxin was found there three years ago.

The Environmental Protection Agency will spend about a week collecting more than 200 soil samples from a small section of woods, lawns and back yards in North Providence, where the highest dioxin levels have been found.

The tests are a key step in zeroing in on the source of the pollution and assessing whether the river is polluted enough to qualify for federal cleanup funds.

``What we've done to date is take some hit-or-miss samples," EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming said yesterday. ``This is a much more comprehensive, methodical effort."

A team from the agency's Superfund office in Edison, N.J., was scheduled to set up a temporary office inside a trailer beside the Centredale Manor high-rise for the elderly. Some of the most worrisome dioxin levels have been detected around the high-rise.

The team of about 20 workers was expected to get a head start yesterday afternoon by marking off a grid of testing sites with small flags, aided by a satellite-based global positioning system.

An EPA worker, meanwhile, was knocking on doors nearby, handing out pamphlets and telling residents what to expect. For the most part, EPA officials say, the work will consist of employees in plain clothes quietly spooning surface soil into glass vials.

The sampling will lay the groundwork for an extensive report on the river's woes that local EPA officials plan to submit to the agency's headquarters, probably in the fall. EPA officials in Washington will study the report to determine whether to place the river on the Superfund program's list of the country's most contaminated properties.

Placement on the list would put the Woonasquatucket onto a fast track for federally financed cleanup. But regional EPA officials say that qualifying for the Superfund is far from certain.

``I don't think it's a definite unless we find out something pretty drastic," said Richard C. Boynton, chief of the Rhode Island and New Hampshire Superfund section of the New England EPA office.

THE SAMPLING that begins today will cover a half-mile span of the river --

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from Route 44 to the north and Allendale Pond to the south -- where earlier tests have shown the highest levels of dioxin. The EPA finished cordoning off the area with plastic orange fencing about a week ago.

Many of the tests will be of soil around Centredale Manor, a rectangular eight-story building erected on the site of former chemical manufacturing and barrel-cleaning plants. The EPA has described the area as a central target of its inquiry into the source of what is believed to be decades-old pollution.

Workers will also take a few soil samples along the Johnston side of the river and some samples of sediment from the river itself.

The test results, expected by early summer, will also be used to refine an ongoing study of any health risks posed by the dioxin pollution and to help investigators pinpoint the source of the contamination.

Boynton said that EPA enforcement officials have for two months been poring over old photographs and other records in search of companies that may have been responsible for the contamination.

``It's narrowing down to a smaller and smaller area," Fleming said.

Dioxin, a byproduct of companies that use chlorine, is toxic to people exposed to large amounts over long periods of time. The World Health Organization has termed it a known cause of cancer in humans, though its health risks are still debated by many scientists.

North Providence residents have been warned against eating fish from the river or letting children play in the water or along the banks. Occasional canoe rides and walks along the river are relatively safe.

Though officials have so far described the health risks as no more than modest, fear has gripped some people.

Little League officials in North Providence are waiting for test results before deciding whether to continue having baseball games at Lee Romano Field, which borders the Woonasquatucket. And Providence school officials have put off plans to build two schools at a park along a stretch of the river.

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Tuesday, February 9, 1999

Providence Journal 2/9/99

Dioxin fails to draw

■ The topic at last night's Town Hall meeting was environmental legislation, and only one state lawmaker -- and few people -- attended.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- The dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River has certainly increased awareness about environmental problems facing urban areas -- but apparently not as much as some had hoped.

The town's fledgling Environmental Commission held a meeting last night in Town Hall to educate North Providence and Johnston state legislators about upcoming bills that would affect the environment across the state.

But the target audience was pretty much a no-show.

Sen. Catherine Graziano, D-Dist 5., attended. Rep. Bambilyn Cambio, D-North Providence, sent an aide.

Johnston and North Providence legislators have had a disappointing track record on environmental law making, Paul McElroy, a member of the commission, told the thin crowd.

``And I think it's because they don't understand it," he said. ``That's why we offered this night -- but unfortunately they didn't show up."

Representatives from Save the Bay, the Environmental Protection Agency and a group promoting a greenway along the Woonasquatucket did show up, as did several Town Council members.

``We, the people sitting here, are not going to make the changes," McElroy said. ``We can start it, but it's going to be our grandchildren that carry it through."

Protecting natural resources, he said, is an important mission. And it has been a lonely one.

``I don't know what I have to say to get people to wake up to what's going on in the world," McElroy said. ``It's not just the North Providence, it's not just the Woonasquatucket River. We're destroying our oceans. We're destroying our rain forests.

``But let's start at home," he said. ``Let's do our job at home."

The commission was formed about 11/2 years ago when the town's environmental council and its beautification program merged. Locally, one of the commission's main goals is beautification through tree planting. Last year it helped plant 150 shrubs and trees throughout the town and this year it plans to do the same.

More

Dioxin fails to draw... continued

Providence Journal
2/9/99

But the underlying goal is to increase people's awareness of the environment and to help them see that natural resources are an issue, even in cities, McElroy said.

"They're very indifferent to the environment," he said. ``The thought doesn't cross their minds that they're one of the stewards of the earth as well as they guy that lives out in Wyoming."

Save the Bay gave a presentation on proposed legislation that would use existing state funds to restore several sensitive marine habitats in Narragansett Bay and give towns like North Providence money for restoring fish runs on rivers by building fish ladders or taking out old mill dams.

While many state rivers were heavily polluted in years past, much has been done in recent decades, said Adam Lipsky, a habitat specialist for Save the Bay. And as a result, Lipsky said, ``We've really gotten to the point where we can start thinking about restoring habitat."

Last night's meeting focused on broader issues than the Woonasquatucket, but the recent findings of contamination in the river were a point of discussion.

"One of the things that's happening because of the dioxin is people are becoming aware of the Woonasquatucket," Graziano said. ``A little bit of that news may very well generate a lot of good news."

Before the meeting, McElroy expressed similar feelings. ``I'm very sorry about what happened with the river," he said, ``but it's good in another way. It's an awakening for people in North Providence that we have to address environmental issues. I don't want them to put their heads in the sand."

CALEDONIAN-RECORD
ST JOHNSBURY, VT
DAILY 11,500
MONDAY
FEB 1 1999
NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.

Recent Dioxin Discovery Taints Image Of Rhode Island's Rivers

EPA

PROVIDENCE (AP) – Local residents and visitors came in droves to downtown Providence's Waterplace Park last summer to watch the WaterFire torch display along the Woonasquatucket River.

But now, the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project has put a hold on its annual river cleanup and may eliminate canoeing at its annual River Festival in June.

The recent discovery of cancer-causing dioxin along the Woonasquatucket River in North Providence has tarnished the image of Rhode Island's urban rivers, which had been experiencing a rebirth after a period of unpopularity stemming from the industrial era.

"We were really beginning to turn the corner in our attitudes toward urban industrial rivers and beginning to see them as important recreational assets and cultural amenities," Patrick Malone, a Brown University historian, told The Providence Sunday Journal. "This kind of scare sets people back."

A century ago, many Rhode Islanders chose to stay away from urban rivers. Waterways flowed with dyes from textile mills, animal waste from slaughter houses, and flushed sewage – pollution that was blamed for deadly outbreaks of typhoid fever and other diseases.

In recent years, various groups have worked to transform the banks of these rivers into hiking trails, bike paths, and canoe launches.

But three weeks ago when the EPA reported high levels of dioxin in the fish in the Woonasquatucket River and in the soil along certain areas of the river, the specter of the state's industrial past resurfaced.

"This has really been overwhelming for all of us," said Jane Sherman, director of the Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project, a multi-million dollar campaign to refashion the waterway. "It's an issue no one expected to happen."

Other groups working on river projects are being more cautious about their plans.

Friends of the Moshassuck, a group that wants to forge a short walking path and run a school program along that river, recently asked the EPA for dioxin test results.

"It would at least be helpful for us to know what's there," said Greg Gerritt, director of Friends of the Moshassuck. "Then we can make sure we're designing activities that keep a margin of safety."

Sherman, Gerritt and others say as greenways begin to replace factories and railroads along the rivers that once powered the industrial revolution, the state will be increasingly forced to grapple with environmental problems left over from the past.

Responding to pressure from an environmental group, Gov. Lincoln Almond is expected to call this week for a multi-agency committee to organize a sediment sampling in the state's urban rivers besides the Woonasquatucket.

But both the state Department of Environmental Management and the EPA said widespread sediment testing of other urban rivers in Rhode Island was not necessarily a good idea.

"I don't know that it's prudent to go out and do sediment testing without considering who's fishing in the river and where," said Robert Mendoza, chief of the EPA's Rhode Island office. "I think the goal is to take a measured approach."

State regulators police what companies dump, but they routinely sample water quality in just two urban rivers – the Blackstone and the Pawtuxet.

The main reason dioxin has eluded detection for so many decades is that no one imagined it existed in Rhode Island.

Some thought the state never had the kinds of companies that released dioxin, a byproduct of paper bleaching and other manufacturing processes that use chlorine. Others acknowledge they were lulled into a sense of security by all the good press about Rhode Island's urban rivers rebirth.

Robert Vanderslice, chief of the state Health Department's office of environmental risk, said he questioned where the agency should sample for dioxin until the chemical was discovered in fish in the Woonasquatucket in 1996.

'We never thought dioxin was a problem," Vanderslice said. "No one was more surprised than me about the dioxin results."

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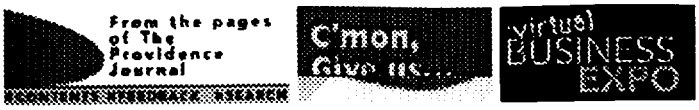

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1.29.99 07:09:48

Dioxin levels found to be low

▪ But the EPA stresses that the results from the Jan. 19 sampling are preliminary and that the tested areas along the Woonasquatucket River should not be deemed safe.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Early test results of recent soil samples from the Lee Romano baseball field and the local Boys and Girls Club show dioxin levels are below the amount considered troublesome by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The samples were taken Jan. 15, three days after the EPA announced that high levels of the cancer-causing chemical had been found in sediment and soil at several spots along the Woonasquatucket River.

The preliminary tests of the new sampling screened only for 2,3,7,8-TCDD, the most toxic forms of dioxin. Further analysis will test for about 20 other types of dioxin.

Though there is no evidence of dioxin contamination in the ball field or near the Boys and Girls Club, John P. DeVillars, administrator of the EPA's New England region, cautioned against deeming the area safe.

``It's important to emphasize that these results are very preliminary and could change once a full analysis of the samples is completed by early March," he said.

The samples taken from around the ball field and the Boys and Girls Club showed no dioxin levels higher than one part per billion, which is the detection limit of the test. The state Department of Health considers any readings higher than one part per billion to be cause for concern.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis said he would be meeting next week with Little League organizers to discuss the coming season. While a contingency plan will be

developed, Mollis said, ``it looks like we're definitely going to be able to play there."

Two of the 17 recent samples -- both taken at Centredale Manor property -- show levels of TCDD dioxins of 4.2 and 6 parts per billion. In earlier EPA tests, the highest concentrations of dioxins had been found on the river bank and in a drainage ditch behind the housing complex for the elderly.

``The results from Centredale reinforce the direction we're already headed in," DeVillars said. ``This property must continue to be a primary focus of the EPA's attention."

DeVillars said more fencing will be installed around the two sampling spots at Centredale Manor. More samples will be taken from the area in the coming weeks.

On Wednesday, EPA field teams took five soil samples near the concession stands and the batting cages at the Little League field, areas which had not been tested before. Town officials had expressed concern that these areas -- especially spots around the concession stand that have been known to flood -- might be contaminated, even if the field is safe.

The EPA is planning to take more tests along the river. The first focus area will be from just above Brook Village, a housing complex for the elderly next to Centredale Manor, to the Allendale Dam, said Tom Condon, the EPA's on-scene coordinator. The EPA is still investigating possible sources of the dioxin contamination.

Though encouraged by the new test results, Robert Vanderslice, chief of the office of environmental health risk assessment for the Department of Health, said he would ``not be happy until we find the source"

U.S. Sen. Jack Reed sent a letter to EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner yesterday urging the agency to further restrict access to the contaminated areas, expand the public information campaign and work with the Department of Health to conduct a health screening of area residents and people who might have moved away.

The EPA also screened water samples taken from the

Yacht Club Bottling Works Co. in North Providence and the Pied Piper Nursery School in Johnston.

Early results did not show dioxin levels above one part per trillion, which is the limit of the preliminary screening method. Results of a more thorough analysis now being done are expected in mid-February.

Those tests will be able to detect dioxin at concentrations as low as 10 parts per quadrillion. The federal drinking water standard is 30 parts per quadrillion, or .03 parts per trillion.

Add [redacted] on this topic

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PROVIDENCE JOURNAL
PROVIDENCE, RI
DAILY 188,217
WEDNESDAY
JAN 27 1999

NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC

New dioxin warnings to target S.E. Asians

■ Signs and handouts about dioxins in the Woonasquatucket River are being translated into Southeast Asian languages, to reach a group that is at high risk from contaminated fish.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE — Fact sheets about dioxin contamination are being translated into several Southeast Asian languages and distributed to people living near the Woonasquatucket River, to ensure that residents know the possible dangers of eating fish from the river.

Officials from the federal Environmental Protection Agency are working with Joseph Le, executive director of the Socio-Economic Development Commission for Southeast Asian Populations, to notify Southeast Asians in the area.

NORTH PROVIDENCE

Question-and-answer sheets on dioxins and advisories warning against the consumption of fish will be translated into Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian.

The EPA is also developing a plan to educate people about contamination in the river, said Lois Adams, regional coordinator for the EPA's Urban Environmental Initiative.

Federal and state officials acknowledged last week that not enough had been done to educate Southeast Asians about dioxin contamination since 1996, when high levels of the cancer-causing chemicals were first found in fish taken from the river.

Anecdotal evidence suggests Southeast Asians may have been using the river for subsistence fishing.

Signs warning against eating fish from the river were posted last year — but only in English and Spanish. Signs in Southeast Asian languages will be posted this spring.

"Clearly, the Southeast Asian communities really have to be the ones who are notified," said U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy during a briefing on the dioxin contamination Monday at Town Hall.

At that same meeting, EPA officials announced that preliminary test results for dioxins at the Lee Romano Little League field might be available as soon as tomorrow. The results should give the town a clearer idea of whether the field can be used for baseball games.

On Jan. 15, about 20 samples were taken at sites along the river, including soil from home plate, second base and right field on the Little League field.

As long as the new test results don't show high readings, there shouldn't be a problem with children using the field this year, said John DeVillars, the administrator for the EPA's New England region. The field does not flood, he said, and dirt on the field is replaced often, reducing the likelihood of contamination.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis has said that an alternate ball field will be found if the EPA says that the Lee Romano field is not 100 percent safe. "We will find a way," he said.

Meanwhile, according to DeVillars, the EPA is closing in on the companies that might be responsible for contaminating the river with dioxins. He said that the EPA might be announcing some results of its investigation as soon as this week.

DeVillars said that the EPA is ready to begin a second round of inspections to make sure that businesses in the area are complying with environmental protection laws.

Since last summer, the EPA has inspected 39 companies in North Providence and surrounding communities. It also has been explaining compliance requirements to the businesses.

"It's a good complementary piece to what we're doing with the dioxin issue," said Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office.

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NEWPORT DAILY NEWS
NEWPORT, RI
DAILY 14,650
TUESDAY
JAN 26 1999
NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.

Signs in Asian languages to be posted along river

EPA

NORTH PROVIDENCE (AP) — Warning signs in Southeast Asian languages will be added to those in English along the dioxin-contaminated Woonasquatucket River, a federal official said.

The river's fish has been a source of food for Laotians, Vietnamese and other immigrants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wants to make sure that they get the message that fish taken from the river should not be eaten.

So signs in Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese are being made to post along the river, said John P. DeVillars, EPA regional director.

DeVillars made the announcement Monday in a meeting in North Providence Town Hall with U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, D-R.I., state Sen. John A. Celona and Mayor A. Ralph Mollis.

DeVillars said he is meeting today with Joseph Le, executive director of the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asian Populations, who expressed concern about risk to the Southeast Asian community because they sometimes eat fish they catch in the river.

On the Woonasquatucket's shore and in its sediment, the EPA has found dioxin levels as high as 14.8 times the safe limit established by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Regrettably this is not a terribly unusual situation," said DeVillars, comparing the Woonasquatucket pollution to that of at least 80 Superfund cleanup sites throughout New England.

> 'It's probably safe to assume that the kids who have been playing there may be OK.'
>
> — John P. DeVillars
> Environmental Protection Agency

DeVillars said officials have tentatively identified two companies, Crown Chemical and barrel-recycling facility Metro Atlantic, as possible sources of the contamination. The investigation is continuing.

Mollis said residents are especially worried about whether children playing baseball at a field near the river could have been exposed to the dioxin.

DeVillars said it was his understanding that the soil around the field is replaced often, and that the area is not prone to flooding, leading him to speculate that the concentration of dioxin may not be as high near the playing field.

"It's probably safe to assume that the kids who have been playing there may be OK," DeVillars said.

Celona said homeowners are worried their properties could lose value as a result of the contamination.

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SUNDAY WESTERLY SUN
WESTERLY, RI
SUNDAY 12,275

JAN 24 1999

EPA to notify Southeast Asians about dioxins

EPA

North Providence (AP) — A few years ago, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told a Southeast Asian group about the potential dangers of fishing in certain areas of the dioxin-contaminated Woonasquatucket River.

But Joseph Le, executive director of the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asian Populations, said he has not heard from the EPA since and was not notified of the recent discovery of more dioxin near the river.

"I haven't seen any kind of outreach or fliers to try to inform the Southeast Asian community," Le said.

The EPA and state officials acknowledge that not enough has been done to notify Southeast Asians about the high levels of dioxin contained in the river's fish and the soil along its banks.

Southeast Asians are considered to be most at risk because they use the river for subsistence fishing, although most of the evidence is anecdotal. Fishing in the river is considered a much greater health risk than exposure to its soil or sediment.

Although the EPA learned about dioxins in the fish three years ago, efforts to keep people from fishing in the river have not been directed at Southeast Asians.

Instead, pamphlets and warning signs were printed last summer in English and Spanish. The signs also picture a knife, a fork, and a fish with a slash through it.

"You need to do more than put up signs along the river," said Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office. "You need more direct interaction."

Mendoza said the EPA and others are stepping up their efforts to get the word out to the Southeast Asian community.

Pamphlets on dioxin will be translated into Southeast Asian languages, health officials may walk though neighborhoods to spread the message and public meetings will be held.

IEWPORT DAILY NEWS
NEWPORT, RI
DAILY 14,650
FRIDAY
JAN 22 1999

EPA to target Southeast Asians for warnings on dioxins in river

NORTH PROVIDENCE (AP) — A few years ago, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told a Southeast Asian group about potential dangers of fishing in certain areas of the Woonasquatucket River.

But Joseph Le, executive director of the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asian Populations, said he has not heard from the EPA since and was not notified of recent finding of dioxins in the river.

"I haven't seen any kind of outreach or fliers to try to inform the Southeast Asian community," Le said.

The EPA and state officials acknowledge that not enough has been done to notify Southeast Asians about the high levels of dioxin contained in the river's fish and the soil along the river.

Southeast Asians are considered to be most at risk because they use the river for subsistence fishing, although most of the evidence is anecdotal. Fishing in the river is considered a much greater health risk than exposure to its soil or sediment.

Although the EPA learned about dioxins in the fish three years ago, efforts to keep people from fishing in the river have not been directed at Southeast Asians.

Instead, pamphlets and warning signs were printed last summer in English and Spanish. The signs also picture a knife, a fork, and a fish with a slash through it.

"You need to do more than put up signs along the river," said Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office. "You need more direct interaction."

Mendoza said the EPA and others are stepping up their efforts to get the word out to the Southeast Asian community.

Pamphlets on dioxin will be translated into Southeast Asian languages, health officials may walk through neighborhoods to spread the message and public meetings will be held.

Louise House, an environmental scientist with the Agency for Toxic Substances, said language can be a major barrier in trying to inform Southeast Asians because they may not be familiar with terms used to talk about dioxin exposure.

"It's not easy to get the message across when they don't have those words in their language," House said. "I wonder what they think when they see those signs."

Le says it's easy for his group to spread the word to Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong and Vietnamese populations in Rhode Island. But Le said he first needs to be informed of the contamination.

Providence residents concerned about the contamination found in North Providence were told Thursday that dioxin levels at Providence sites were relatively low. Officials warned residents against eating fish, but said boating and swimming are safe.

Last week, the EPA released results of tests taken last fall in North Providence that showed levels of dioxin as high as 14.8 times the safe limit established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The EPA will spend an additional $1 million to speed up and expand efforts to study the contamination problem.

88

Alice Kaufman

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Providence Journal 1/22/99

EPA to focus on Asians for dioxin education

▪ Officials acknowledge more must be done to warn Southeast Asians, who have fished in the Woonasquatucket River, about the cancer-causing toxin.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Federal and state officials investigating dioxin contamination in the Woonasquatucket River acknowledged yesterday that not enough has been done to notify the people who may be most at risk.

Southeast Asian populations in the area, environmental officials say, have used the river for subsistence fishing. The Environmental Protection Agency first tested the river's fish three years ago upon learning these and other groups fished there.

But since the discovery that the fish contain high levels of the cancer-causing chemical, efforts to keep people from fishing in the river have not been directed at Southeast Asian groups.

Rather, pamphlets were printed in English and Spanish warning of the pollution and, last summer, warning signs in English and Spanish were posted along the river. The signs also picture a knife, a fork and a fish with a slash through it.

Consuming fish from the river is considered a much greater health risk than exposure to its soil or sediment.

There is no solid data on how many people might be eating fish from the river, or who they might be. Most evidence is anecdotal, though eel traps have been found in the water.

Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office, agreed yesterday that not enough has been done to reach Southeast Asian populations. ``You need to do more than put up signs along the river," he said. ``You need more direct interaction."

Mendoza said the EPA and others involved in the dioxin investigation are now doing more community outreach. ``We're going to be taking on a much more ambitious effort to reach out to the area," he said.

In addition to public meetings being scheduled for areas near the river, pamphlets on dioxin will be translated into Southeast Asian languages and health officials could be walking through neighborhoods to spread their message.

The effort will be aided by $1 million released Wednesday from the EPA's Washington office for further testing along the river and educating the public on the potential hazards of dioxins.

Also, a team from the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will be in town next week to start their own review of the contamination. The team, which will include a toxicologist and a physician, will study EPA test results, talk with community groups and determine

-Cont'-

pg 3

To warn people of the possible risks of eating fish from the river, pamphlets were distributed in English and Spanish and EPA officials met with community groups.

Lois Adams, the Urban Environmental Initiative's regional coordinator, said she believed that Southeast Asians were included in the efforts.

``Outreach was done to the areas where that would have been appropriate," she said.

The EPA and the state Department of Health also issued a news release warning that fish caught in the river should be released.

Last June, the first signs were posted warning people against eating the fish. The EPA has added 40 more since August -- though ``unfortunately," Mendoza said, ``as soon as the signs were going up, people were pulling them down for souvenirs."

The new public education effort will include more pamphlets and meetings, but special considerations will be made for minority populations who may have limited access to the current information.

``The answer isn't just to translate [fact sheets] and put them on the Web," said Robert Vanderslice, chief of the office of environmental health risk assessment for the Department of Health. ``You have to do better than that."

More important, Vanderslice said, is going into the communities and meeting with people. ``We feel that for a lot of groups that's the only way," he said.

Add Your two cents on this topic

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Last night, Woonasquatucket Greenways director Jane Sherman acknowledged that the project could now be slowed to the extent that citizens' concerns will have to be addressed, particularly parents whose children will want to play along the river.

Before any further work, she said, the state and federal officials will have to closely monitor areas along the river where children are most likely to play, and undertake many more tests to make absolutely sure that the areas are safe.

Two Providence lawmakers, Sen. David Igliozzi and Rep. Steven F. Smith, expressed concern that dioxin contaminants could make their way into Providence were the Lymansville Dam in North Providence to fail. Igliozzi said the two were startled to find that until last week the state did not have a dam inspector, even though a position for one had been included in the state budget.

Last night's meeting was called by Jeanne Russell, a member of the Hartford Park Tenants Association and a member of the steering committee for the American Heritage Rivers. It drew a host of officials, including U.S. Rep. Robert Weygand, who told parents: ``If you know areas where you think your kids have been exposed to toxin, we'd like to hear from you."

Add your own comments on this topic

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Angela Bonarrigo

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Thursday; January 21, 1999

Providence Journal 1/21/99

EPA steps up response to river dioxin findings

■ The federal agency will release $1 million in emergency funds to protect the public while a longer-term plan for dealing with the Woonasquatucket River's problems is drawn up.

By ARIEL SABAR
and BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writers

Amid growing demands for swift action on the Woonasquatucket River's pollution woes, the Environmental Protection Agency pledged $1 million yesterday for more tests along the river, more protective fences, and more meetings with the public.

The money was released by the EPA's Washington headquarters and drawn from a special fund for emergency cleanups.

At least some of the work that the new money will finance would have been done anyway, an EPA official said. But the release of emergency money signals that the river's taint has risen to the radar screens of EPA officials in the nation's capital.

In an interview yesterday, EPA chief Carol M. Browner said that the money locks the agency into a broader review of health risks that could eventually lead to a cleanup.

``We, working with the state, will absolutely do what is necessary," Browner said by phone yesterday from Washington. ``This emergency-response money allows us and the state to get the kind of sampling we need to move us toward an emergency action plan."

Since announcing last week that high levels of dioxin were found along the urban river's North Providence leg, the agency has been hustling to calm residents' fears about the poisonous chemical.

The announcement yesterday was embraced by local officials and an environmental group as an important step. But experts say that many more millions of dollars will be necessary should officials decide to mop up contamination along the Woonasquatucket, which meanders through a working-class section of North Providence that once bustled with factories and mills.

``This [money] isn't going to clean it up," said Sen. John H. Chafee, who was tipped off to yesterday's announcement during a chance encounter with Browner at the president's State of the Union address Tuesday night. ``But it's an absolutely necessary first step."

Aimee Tavares, the director of Rhode Island Clean Water Action, an environmental group that has blasted the EPA's earlier handling of the dioxin problems, lauded the emergency funds, but said she hoped it was more than window dressing.

More

EPA steps up response... continued

Providence Journal
1/21/99

"This shouldn't be paying for what they already said they were going to do," she said. "This should be paying for additional testing, additional outreach." Meanwhile, a committee charged with mapping plans for more tests will meet for the first time today, at noon in North Providence Town Hall. The Management Action Committee, as it is called, is chaired by Mayor A. Ralph Mollis and the EPA's local coordinator, Tom Condon. Its meeting is open to the public.

Although unhealthful levels of dioxin were found in the river's fish as far back as 1996, public concern rocketed last week when the EPA announced that troubling dioxin levels had been found in recent tests of riverbank sediment and soil. Those levels were as high as 14 times EPA safety limits.

Scientists say that dioxin -- a cancer-causing byproduct of industrial processes, such as paper bleaching, that use chlorine -- is harmful to humans only after long exposure to large quantities. Eating fish from the river is dangerous, scientists say, but canoeing there is not.

In a few days, the EPA will complete a double check of its test results and send them to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, an arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The registry will use the tests to assess the extent of any public-health threat. Its results are due next month.

If there is a threat, the EPA will lay the groundwork for a cleanup, which could begin as early as April, said EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming.

But Fleming declined to say what his agency would do if the registry finds no health risk. Agency officials did not return phone calls yesterday.

The degree of public danger remains an open question, and one to which local politicians have been clamoring for answers.

A state Health Department study last week found that cancer levels near the river were lower than the state average.

And one of the EPA's top dioxin experts, when told yesterday of the river's dioxin levels, said she doubted many people had been exposed to harmful amounts of dioxin. Still, she concurred with some local officials who have called for blood tests of residents near the river.

"Those are definitely elevated levels, there's no ifs, ands or buts about that," said Linda Birnbaum, the EPA director of experimental toxicology, who has studied dioxins for 20 years. "But to me, what I'd really like to know is, is it getting into the people, and are their levels significantly elevated? That, to me, would be the real question."

Disease registry officials are planning to meet with area doctors and pass out leaflets about dioxins and their associated diseases, including cancer, reproductive and immune disorders and an acne-like skin condition.

But Robert Vanderslice, chief of the state Health Department's office of environmental risk, said yesterday that the state has neither the advanced technology nor the money to test blood for dioxin, a complicated task that can cost up to $2,000 per person.

More

EPA steps up response... continued

Providence Journal
1/21/99

``You can't send somebody to their physician and have them order this test," he said. ``There's no existing medical infrastructure to support that kind of thing."

He added that disease registry officials ``don't feel this testing would be appropriate, based on what they know."

The EPA said yesterday that the purpose of the $1 million package is relatively modest: to protect the public while a longer-term plan for dealing with the river's problems is drawn up.

The money will help pay for new dioxin testing in river sediment and soil, more fencing around trouble spots, and more meetings and information for the public -- much of which the EPA's New England office had already promised. About five groups, including a tenants' association in Providence, have requested meetings with the EPA, an EPA official said yesterday.

Without the $1 million infusion, said the EPA's Fleming, ``We would have found the necessary money to do sampling." He said the agency has spent $200,000 on dioxin tests of the Woonasquatucket since 1996.

Still, the million-dollar allotment from EPA headquarters reflects a new, heightened level of concern among top agency officials and suggests that pressure from the state's congressional delegation may be having an effect.

The state's members of Congress have noted in letters to Browner that the Clinton administration last year dubbed the waterway an American Heritage River, a lofty title that deems the river worthy of historical note and of speedy access to federal preservation and development grants.

Some speculated yesterday that the label may have helped prod EPA officials in Washington to act quickly on the requests for help.

The new money comes from an emergency fund, established by the federal Superfund Law, set up to safeguard the public against immediate threats from pollution. According to Browner, about $25 million is drawn from the fund each year to pay for about 200 ``emergency responses" around the country.

Browner said the money has been used in the past in cases as minor as removing a barrel or two of hazardous waste and as serious as relocating residents. The latter occurred in a Louisiana case last year involving a flea market that had been hawking an illegal and highly toxic pest-spray.

Experts said yesterday that dioxin cleanups can run into the tens of millions of dollars and may involve bringing high-tech dredging equipment to the river and then trucking away the waste to special, high-heat incinerators.

``You can't use ordinary old dredges, because what you don't want to do is stir up" dioxin sediments in the river, said Michael A. Kamrin, a professor at the Institute for Environmental Toxicology, at Michigan State University. ``You need special equipment that captures stuff before it is moved around. It's a very expensive proposition."

EPA steps up response... continued

Providence Journal 1/21/99

The EPA's headquarters contacted The Journal last week to say Browner would be available for interviews about the environmental proposals unveiled in President Clinton's State of the Union address. Browner agreed yesterday to answer questions about the Woonasquatucket as well.

``I think we do need to know more," she said of the river, adding that her staff in Washington was working on the matter with EPA officials in New England. ``We have this emergency fund which we use for situations like this so we can know more. Additional sampling is absolutely warranted. I think the public deserves answers to questions."

The EPA's local hot line for dioxin information is staffed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and will be operating at least through Friday. The number is 231-9393.

NORTH PROVIDENCE NORTH STAR

NORTH PROVIDENCE, RI
WEEKLY

JAN 21 1999

NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC

Frequently asked questions (And the EPA's answers)

JOHN DeVILLARS, administrator for the EPA's New England regional office, explains the agency's role in assessing dioxin levels and cleaning the banks of the Woonasquatucket River. He spoke at a public meeting at North Providence High School on Sunday. (*North Star* photo by Greg Pare)

What are the health risks of dioxin?

Health risks from dioxins are chronic effects, meaning they could occur as a result of long-term repeated exposure. One meal of contaminated fish or one day of wading in the river will not result in significant effects.

At high or repeated levels of exposure, dioxin is an extremely potent chemical which can produce a variety of effects in humans and animals. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Health and Human Services (DOH), and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have concluded that dioxin can cause cancer in animals.

I played in the river for twenty years growing up. I chased balls from Lee Romano Field into the river, or swam or canoed in it regularly for years. Am I going to get cancer?

There is no easy answer to this question, but at Sunday's public meeting on the river, this was what was on everybody's minds. EPA officials described the scenario like this:

A person is likely to ingest 100 milligrams of soil (less than most aspirin tablets) every day through means, mostly hand to mouth contact. In a worse case scenario, assume all of this soil was contaminated at 8 parts per billion, like the Lee Romano ball field. (The EPA takes action at any amount over one part per billion.)

This person is ten percent more likely to develop cancer as a result of dioxin than a person who had not been in frequent contact with contaminated areas--and ten percent is figuring very high, according to Robert W. Amler, chief medical officer for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a federal public health agency involved with hazardous waste issues.

Can I get my yard tested?

Over 30 people have already requested that their property be tested for dioxin. The EPA will test areas it considers to be in proximity of risk. To request testing, contact the EPA's Woonasquatucket River Hotline at 231-9393.

Will officials from the EPA talk with my group?

People can always get one on one information through the hotline. Kristi Rea, the Providence City Program Director with the EPA's Urban Environmental Initiatives, says the hot line has been busy. It received over 50 calls on Tuesday. Ms. Rea says that people appreciate being able to talk one on one with a person about their concerns.

Informational meetings may also be requested. Officials will make themselves available to talk with companies, groups, agencies and individuals who want to learn more about what the EPA is doing or the risks associated with dioxin.

Where in the Woonasquatucket river basin have dioxins been found?

Dioxins have been found in the sediments of the Woonasquatucket River and in fish caught from the river. The highest levels have been found in fish caught in the river. Elevated levels have also been found behind the Allendale and Lymansville Dams. Sediments are typically concentrated behind dams. Elevated levels of dioxin have been found in samples taken from the riverbank and soils near Centredale Manor and on the riverbank adjacent to the Lee Romano Field, the highest concentration in the sediment coming from samples taken from the banks near the Centredale Manor.

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North Providence 1/21 2

North Star

How did the dioxins get there?

John P. DeVillars, the EPA's New England Administrator, says that the agency is certain the dioxins are not coming from an ongoing source. In other words, nobody is dumping dioxins in the river now.

The most likely source, he says, is the former New England Container Corporation, a barrel recycling company that used to stand with Crown Metro Company where Centredale Manor is now. Hundreds of barrels were recovered from the grounds there in the early 1980s.

New England Container Corporation relocated to a modern facility in Smithfield and was bought by a New Jersey company, Russell Stanley Holdings Inc., last year. Crown Metro closed its local plant before burning down decades ago.

Mr. DeVillars emphasized that, while it is likely this is where the dioxin originated, it can not be concluded yet.

The dioxins were the result of some kind of manufacturing, however.

Since dioxins tend to attach to particles of soil or sediment, any process that moves the soil or sediment can also move the attached dioxins. Sediments can be carried by the river water downstream or up onto the riverbanks or floodplains, particularly during floods. When the floodwaters recede, the river sediments and attached dioxins can be left behind.

THE LAZY WATERS of the Woonasquatucket River may appear harmless, but health experts caution against exposure to the sediment, which contains "unacceptable" levels of dioxin, a byproduct of manufacturing. The situation is cause for caution, not alarm, say EPA officials. (*North Star* photo by Albert Tavakalov)

What can I do to protect myself and my family from exposure to dioxins?

The primary sources of exposure to dioxins is through consumption of contaminated fish and direct contact with contaminated sediments. Two steps for avoiding dioxin exposure are: (1) Don't eat the fish, as the EPA and DOH have advised since 1996; and (2) Avoid contact with contaminated soil, by not wading or swimming in the river or playing along the riverbanks.

What if I do come into contact with the contaminated sediment?

If you do come into contact with contaminated soil. wash it off. Accidentally ingesting contaminated soil, through hand to mouth contact, could be dangerous and should be avoided.

Is my tap water safe to drink?

The Woonasquatucket River is not used for drinking water. Tap water for North Providence comes from the Scituate Reservoir. The Providence Water Supply Board has tested this drinking water for dioxins and found none.

How can I get more information?

A hotline will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at least through Friday, January 22. The hotline numbers are: 231-9393, or 1-888-372-7341.

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JAN 28 1999
NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.

More EPA inspections under way along river

'EPA is committed to identifying and eliminating sources of pollution into the Woonasquatucket River.'

JOHN P. DEVILLARS, EPA

■ The new sweep to ensure that companies are complying with antipollution laws is closely tied to the investigation of dioxin contamination along the Woonasquatucket.

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE — The Environmental Protection Agency is beginning a new round of inspections at companies near the Woonasquatucket River to make sure they are complying with antipollution laws.

The new compliance sweep is closely tied to the investigation of dioxin contamination along the Woonasquatucket. The EPA first began inspecting companies along the river last summer while the river sediment was being tested for dioxin, a man-made chemical believed to cause cancer.

"Whether it's dioxin, wastewater discharges or any other contaminant, EPA is committed to identifying and eliminating sources of pollution into the Woonasquatucket River," said John P. DeVillars, the EPA's New England administrator.

The new enforcement sweep, he said, will be a major step in "making this urban waterway clean and healthy."

The type of inspection will vary by facility, said Peyton Fleming, an EPA spokesman. Inspectors primarily judge the businesses' compliance with the federal Clean Air and Clean Water acts and laws governing underground storage tanks and the storage of hazardous waste.

Field teams from the EPA walked and paddled the river from Harbor Junction Wharf in Providence to the Smithfield line last year, searching for possible sources of pollution. The EPA has inspected 39 businesses in North Providence and surrounding towns since last May. Many of the companies were metal platers and jewelry makers. The EPA also spoke with residents and community leaders about possible polluters in the area.

Those inspections have resulted in one enforcement action so far. The EPA earlier this month proposed fining Microfin Corp., of Providence, $1.15 million for violating hazardous-waste and clean-air laws. The metal finishing company is on Valley Street, along the Woonasquatucket.

Fleming said similar actions from the first round of inspections are expected.

A team from the EPA also will begin working with about three dozen auto body and auto repair shops in the area to make sure they understand their responsibilities under state and federal antipollution laws.

The EPA will also be working with the state Department of Environmental Management to inform local junkyard owners of the legal requirements for implementing storm-water management plans.

"All of these pieces fit together in a watershed approach to the Woonasquatucket River," Fleming said. "We've identified the river watershed as an area that needs attention. It probably didn't get as much attention as other areas of Rhode Island over the years."

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JOHNSTON SUNRISE
JOHNSTON, RI
WEEKLY 6,000

JAN 21 1999

NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPER AGENCY, INC

Johnston residents are concerned about dioxin, too

By Greg Pare

It wasn't only North Providence residents and politicians who crammed into the North Providence High School auditorium Sunday for a public meeting discussing concerns raised when dangerous levels of dioxin were discovered in the sediment of the Woonasquatucket River.

Peppered amongst the North Providence residents were Johnston politicians and citizens.

Mayor William R. Macera was sitting in the front row. State Senator William P. Tocco, Jr. was too.

And several of the residents who asked questions of the assembled officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Health (DOH), and other health agencies were also Johnston residents.

Louise Lawton, for example, talked about her family's situation. Her father died of colon cancer. Both of her daughters—one in her 20s, one in her 30s—have developed cancer.

She also noted that there are little league fields on the Johnston side of the river.

The residents are concerned because the EPA announced last week that dioxin levels in the sediment along the banks of the Woonasquatucket River, which divides North Providence and Johnston, are much higher than expected.

According to the EPA, "Dioxins are an extremely toxic group of man-made chemicals that are unintentionally produced through a number of industrial activities. Dioxins which are released into the environment can remain there for very long periods of time and can be cycled from air to soil to plants to animals to humans."

Dioxins are fat soluble, meaning that they accumulate in fat. It is therefore particularly important that people avoid eating the fish, where dioxins have been found in the tissue.

If a person does eat dioxin-contaminated fish, that dioxin builds up in the person's fatty tissue.

John DeVillars, administrator for the EPA's New England district, notes that while the presence of dioxin is cause for caution, it is not cause for panic.

Most elected officials are urging avoiding contact with the river altogether, though EPA officials stress that the greatest danger is from ingestion of dioxin.

The EPA is taking more sediment samples from the banks of the Woonasquatucket, including the Johnston side. Also, wells have been tested in Johnston, and the EPA will test areas it deems in a close enough proximity to the danger zone, including those in Johnston.

Mayor Macera will serve on an action committee, which meets for the first time today. The committee will act as a board of directors to oversee the progress of assessing the contamination and cleaning up the Woonasquatucket River.

Concerns raised by residents who live near the Woonasquatucket include many similar concerns to those in North Providence. What follows is a list of common questions and answers:

Frequently asked questions (And the EPA's answers)

What are the health risks of dioxin?

Health risks from dioxins are chronic effects, meaning they could occur as a result of long-term repeated exposure. One meal of contaminated fish or one day of wading in the river will not result in significant effects.

At high or repeated levels of exposure, dioxin is an extremely potent chemical which can produce a variety of effects in humans and animals. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Health and Human Services (DOH), and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have concluded that dioxin can cause cancer in animals.

I played in the river for twenty years growing up. I chased balls from the little league field into the river, or swam or canoed in it regularly for years. Am I going to get cancer?

There is no easy answer to this question, but at Sunday's public meeting on the river, this was what was on everybody's minds. EPA officials described the scenario like this:

A person is likely to ingest 100 milligrams of soil (less than most aspirin tablets) every day through means, mostly hand to mouth contact. In a worse case scenario, assume all of this soil was contaminated at 8 parts per billion, like the Lee Romano ball field. (The EPA takes action at any amount over one part per billion.)

This person is ten percent more likely to develop cancer as a result of dioxin than a person who had not been in frequent contact with contaminated areas—and ten percent is figuring very

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Cont'd ②

WITH PEN IN HAND, LOUISE LAWTON of Johnston was one of many concerned residents at a public information meeting on the contamination in the Woonasquatucket River on Sunday at the North Providence High School. Mrs. Lawton believes dioxin levels be responsible for the development of cancer in several of her family members. (*Sun Rise* photo)

high, according to Robert W. Amler, chief medical officer for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a federal public health agency involved with hazardous waste issues.

Can I get my yard tested?

Over 30 people have already requested that their property be tested for dioxin. The EPA will test areas it considers to be in proximity of risk. To request testing, contact the EPA's Woonasquatucket River Hotline at 231-9393.

Will officials from the EPA talk with my group?

Continued on page 12

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Dioxin

Continued from page A

People can always get one on one information through the hotline. Kristi Rea, the Providence City Program Director with the EPA's Urban Environmental Initiatives, says the hot line has been busy. It received over 50 calls on Tuesday. Ms. Rea says that people appreciate being able to talk one on one with a person about their concerns.

Informational meetings may also be requested. Officials will make themselves available to talk with companies, groups, agencies and individuals who want to learn more about what the EPA is doing or the risks associated with dioxin.

How did the dioxins get there?

John P. DeVillars, the EPA's New England Administrator, says that the agency is certain the dioxins are not coming from an ongoing source. In other words, nobody is dumping dioxins in the river now.

The most likely source, he says, is the former New England Container Corporation, a barrel recycling company that used to stand with Crown Metro Company where Centredale Manor is now. Hundreds of barrels were recovered from the grounds there in the early 1980s.

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NORTH PROVIDENCE NORTH STAR
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NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC

Dioxin timeline

1996

May 16: After learning that some people, particularly the southeast Asian population in South Providence, are subsistence fishing from the Woonasquatucket River, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tests fish tissue from fish and eels caught in two Providence locations, Valley Street and Waterplace Park. The tissue was analyzed for 15 contaminants, including metals and pesticides.

October 15: Dioxin, mercury, and Polyclorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) are found in the tissue of sunfish and eel, both bottom feeders who often ingest soil from the river bed.

September 30: The EPA completes human health risk screening. As a result of this, the EPA and the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH) issue a "Catch and Release" statement, warning area residents not to eat fish caught from the river.

Fall: A public information brochure, "Not All Fish are Safe to Eat," is produced and distributed by the EPA. Community meetings are held.

1997

January: The EPA requests laboratory assistance for conducting followup tests of the sediment behind dams, where soil collects, along the river.

July 30: The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) hosts a public meeting to identify watershed priorities. The Woonasquatucket River is named a priority.

October 23 to 24: The EPA takes seven sediment samples from the river. Signs are designed in conjunction with "The Providence Plan" to warn residents not to eat fish from the river.

1998

January: The Urban Rivers Team, comprised of members of the DOH, DEM and EPA, is created.

July 2: The EPA and DOH issue a joint press release that includes their findings of dangerously high dioxin levels in the sediment along the Woonasquatucket River, particularly in North Providence. The agencies reaffirm their catch and release policy.

August 31: Senator John A. Celona in conjunction with the EPA hosts a public information meeting at the Salvatore Mancini Union Free Public Library, where a "Do's and Don't's for the Woonasquatucket River" brochure is distributed.

Fall: Additional samples are collected from two dozen locations, chosen based on the following criteria: high potential for human exposure, frequent flooding potential, concerns identified in earlier samplings, site of potential sources for contaminants. Samples were analyzed for dioxin, PCBs, semivolatile organic compounds, total organic compounds, hexachloroxanthene, and pesticides. Results were to be released in mid-April, 1999.

December: Sen. John Celona, in conjunction with Representative Patrick Kennedy's office and Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, hosts another public information meeting, this time at the Centredale Manor.

1999

January 12: Preliminary results of the most recent round of testing is released before confirmation by a second laboratory because dioxin levels are much higher than expected. Some environmental agencies claim the Woonasquatucket River is the second most polluted river in the country. Mayor Mollis, Sen. Celona, and officials from several environmental agencies take measures to inform the public and address their concerns, including setting up a dioxin hotline and a public information meeting.

January 15: At Senator John Celona's insistence, the EPA erects orange fencing to replace warning tape at Centredale Manor and Lee Romano Little League Field. On the fence are signs in English and Spanish warning residents that the area is contaminated.

January 17: A public information meeting is held in the North Providence High School auditorium.

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PAGE ONE

EPA Says: 'Don't Panic'

Officials urge calm, map out future steps as funding is announced

By Greg Pare

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has indicated one of the ways it will deal with the problem of soil along the Woonasquatucket River that is laden with the carcinogenic substance dioxin is to remove it.

First, however, come more tests. The EPA will test sediment samples and well-water samples in areas it deems at risk of being laden with dioxin within the next 10 days to two weeks. (See the special section on dioxin and the Woonasquatucket, starting on page 8A.)

After all the test results are analyzed, some combination of fencing and removal of contaminated sediment will take place, according to John P. DeVillars, New England administrator for the EPA.

How long this will take, how much it will cost, and who will pay for it remain unknown at this time because the extent of the contamination remains unknown. But elected officials are calling for quick, complete action no matter what the cost.

"I will stop nothing short of quick action," noted Senator John A. Celona, who has been pushing for the cleanup of the Woonasquatucket River since July, when the EPA released the results of its sediment testing which found unacceptable levels of dioxin along the banks of the Woonasquatucket, particularly in North Providence. The most recent round of testing showed levels were much higher than originally thought.

'They are cause for concern. They are cause for caution. They are not cause for alarm or panic.'

-EPA New England Administrator John P. DeVillars

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis echoed Celona's sentiments at a public informational meeting with state officials and health experts on Sunday at the high school. His three step plan included: (1) keeping the public informed, (2) making a full assessment of any and all health risks, and (3) creating a time line for a short-term clean-up plan.

"I can assure you that will be a short-term plan. I will accept no less," said Mayor Mollis.

He also indicated that the cleanup would be complete.

"We will not let one stone remain unturned when it comes to resolving this matter," he said.

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Dioxin

Continued on page 1

Representative Patrick Kennedy reiterated those sentiments, saying, "We will not be satisfied until the entire river is cleaned up."

Also at the meeting, Senator Jack Reed promised that funds for the cleanup would not be a problem.

"Rest assured that the resources will be there to deal with this problem," he said.

"The legacy of a Heritage River can not be pollution and disease, and I assure you, as long as I'm in the Senate, it will not be," he added.

Yesterday, the EPA sent word to Senator Reed and Representative Kennedy that a $1 million award was being allocated to the EPA's New England Office to expediate the assessment of contamination along the river and develop an action plan for cleanup.

The overall message sent at Sunday's meeting to residents was to remain calm. It is important to avoid contact with the river's sediment. It is also important not to overreact, officials agreed.

Dioxin poses a health risk when a person is exposed for a long-term period--meaning years. Even then, repeated exposure over years only moderately increases a person's risk of getting cancer.

"These [dioxin levels] are cause for concern. They are cause for caution. They are not cause for alarm or panic," said Mr. DeVillars.

More likely short-term effects from exposure to the Woonasquatucket River are actually from a problem unrelated to dioxin--bacteria and virus in the water, particularly during flooding, due to the overflow of a combined sewer system that carries both sewage and storm drainage. Short-term effects of exposure to bacteria and virus can include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Mayor Mollis indicated that residents are calm, if the phone calls to the Woonasquatucket River dioxin hotline are any indication.

"The calls have been calls for information, not calls of panic," he said.

Mr. DeVillars noted that the true worry was in the sediment, not the water, and indicated that recreation such as canoeing was acceptable provided hands are washed afterwards. The washing of the hands is actually more a response to the combined sewage system that dumps bacteria and viruses into the river than concern over dioxin, according to Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office.

Nevertheless, most elected officials urged against any contact with the river.

"As a parent and as mayor I would recommend avoiding the area altogether," said Mayor Mollis.

Asked whether there would be a new list of Do's and Don't's issued, Senator Celona said he thought the list was now just one of Don't's.

"There are no more Do's," he said.

An action committee, which will serve like a board of directors to oversee the progress made in addressing this issue, has been formed and will meet weekly, starting this morning. The committee is co-chaired by Mayor Mollis and Tom Condon, the EPA's on-scene coordinator. Other members include Senator Celona, Johnston Mayor William Macera, and officials from several environmental health agencies.

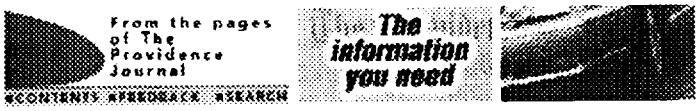
The goal is to make the Woonasquatucket safe.

One might be reminded of a children's nonsense poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter."

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand:
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:
'If this were only cleared away,'
They said, 'it would be grand!'

'If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose,' the Walrus said,
'That they could get it clear?'
'I doubt it,' said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

The above is from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, but its message hits a more serious note for North Providence residents who live and play around the chemically polluted Woonasquatucket River: get rid of the dirt!



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1.18.99 00:05:04

Concentrations far exceed safety levels

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Dioxin levels in the soil along the Woonasquatucket River are as high as as 14.8 parts per billion in some locations, according to definitive data released yesterday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The dioxin concentrations range from 1.5 parts per billion to 14.8 parts per billion in 14 samples taken from three sites -- Centredale Manor, Allendale Dam, and the riverbank near the Lee Romano Little League Field. The threshold at which the EPA takes action is 1 part per billion.

``The results are not cause for excessive alarm or panic, but they do call for a very focused and aggressive response," said John P. DeVillars, EPA's New England administrator.

The highest dioxin concentrations were found in a drainage ditch behind Centredale Manor, in an area the EPA described as not readily accessible.

Early last week, EPA officials said that preliminary results showed levels no higher than 8 parts per billion. The confirmed data was expedited through an EPA laboratory in Kansas City, Kan.

-- Melanie Lefkowitz

Add Your two cents on this topic

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Your two cents

1.18.99 00:05:04

Limited assurance on dioxin troubles residents

- At a public meeting, EPA officials say some North Providence residents may face a ``modest increase" in their risk of developing cancer.

By MELANIE LEFKOWITZ
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Despite assurances from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials that high dioxin levels along the banks of the Woonasquatucket River are no cause for alarm, residents yesterday expressed emotions ranging from shock to fear to anger.

``I'm more than concerned. I'm mad as can be," said Cheryl Eacueo, one of more than 500 people who turned out for a meeting that was organized by U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy to discuss the EPA's findings. Eacueo, who grew up and raised three children in North Providence, currently lives in Cranston.

``Are we going to be burying our kids in 10 years?" she asked.

No, replied Robert W. Amler, chief medical officer for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a federal public health group that advises the EPA.

``These are not risks that you would ordinarily have to put up with, but they're not risks that pose an immediate danger," Amler said.

EPA officials said that in the ``worst case scenario," people who spent several years playing ball in the Lee Romano Little League Field -- an area that showed one of the highest dioxin concentrations -- would face a ``modest increase" in their risk for cancer.

Yesterday's meeting, which was held in the North Providence High School auditorium and attended by a host of prominent politicians, including Governor Almond, U.S. Sen. Jack Reed, U.S. Rep. Robert A.

Weygand, Kennedy and Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, was the latest in a series of community efforts sparked by last week's troublesome disclosures.

Since the preliminary results were released Tuesday, the EPA has met extensively with town officials, erected snow fences around the most affected areas, staffed a telephone hot line and tested 20 additional sites.

``When we find the kinds of concentrations that we have found in North Providence, it is very important to take the kinds of precautions we've been taking," said John P. DeVillars, New England administrator for the EPA. ``I recognize that there's a lot of concern and fear when this kind of information becomes available."

Although the dioxin levels are significant, DeVillars rebutted a claim made by an advocacy group last week that they are the second-highest ever measured on the planet.

Yesterday, for the first time, the EPA released specific numbers for the dioxin levels at three sites -- Centredale Manor, a high-rise for the elderly; Allendale Dam; and the riverbank near the Lee Romano field. In 14 samples, the dioxin concentrations ranged from 1.5 parts per billion to 14.8 parts per billion. The EPA takes action on any finding of 1 part per billion or greater.

The highest concentration of 14.8 parts per billion was found in a drainage ditch behind Centredale Manor. In a sample from the riverbank adjacent to the ball field, the level of dioxin was 8 parts per billion.

Residents were particularly troubled by the concentrations of dioxin near the ball field. John Vernancio, president of the North Providence West Little League, said he has been deluged with calls from concerned parents.

``At what point will I be able to tell the parents of children playing on that ball field that they are safe?" he asked.

Officials did not know.

``I can tell you this," Mollis said. ``You will not use that field until our experts have told us it's 101 percent

safe."

Mollis said that if necessary, he will find another ball field for the 1999 season.

According to an EPA flier distributed at the meeting, dioxins are an extremely toxic group of man-made chemicals that have been shown to cause cancer in animals. In the short term, dioxins cause skin rashes, fever and nausea.

``We are concerned because we are very intolerant of dioxins," said Robert Vanderslice, chief of the Rhode Island Department of Health's risk assessment office. ``However, we do not feel that there is any dioxin-induced disease in this community."

Not everyone was convinced.

``I played ball on the Lee Romano field two days a week, winter and summer, from 1981 to 1991," said Larry Signore, 25, of North Providence. ``I can say that personally, I'm going to seek out a cancer specialist and monitor myself for the rest of my life."

DURING A BRIEFING prior to the public meeting and in his opening remarks, Kennedy criticized the EPA for not testing the dioxin content of the soil sooner.

``What disturbs me is that we would still be waiting for this documentation if not for the red flag waved by a couple of citizens groups," he said at the meeting. ``Why weren't these fences erected months ago? Why weren't these hot lines established long before?"

In an interview, DeVillars said that was a matter of financing and prioritizing.

``You could test every property in every community in America," he said. ``But what we have to do is work within our resources. So you have to be as smart and as focused in your research as possible. Our greatest risk was in the fish, so that's where we went first."

The EPA has been concerned about the Woonasquatucket since 1996, when the agency learned that people were eating fish from the river. That year, the agency tested fish from the river and issued a ban on fishing. In 1997, river sediment was tested for

dioxin, and unsafe levels were found. Soil samples from the banks and outlying areas were taken in September 1998.

Frank O'Donnell, a father of four and a North Providence resident, said he felt that the experts were too vague in addressing citizens' concerns.

``I just wanted to grab them and say, `Answer the question,' " he said. At one point during the meeting, more than a dozen audience members simultaneously called out a similar demand to those on stage.

``You always expect nonsense from politicians, but you expect scientists to tell you the truth," O'Donnell said. ``I'm more scared now than I was when I walked in. It seems like they're covering something up."

Virginia Fitzgerald, who lives on Steven Street in North Providence, said that since the Allendale Dam broke several years ago, the river has annually deposited large amounts of silt in her front yard.

``I'm scared, and I'm angry," she said. ``I've got two kids who have been playing in that water every day of their lives. What's going to happen to my children? I don't think they [government officials] even know."

Add your own comments on this topic

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS
WEEKEND
BANGOR, ME
SAT & SUN 94,790
SATURDAY
JAN 16 1999
NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.
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Scope of R.I. dioxin testing widens

The Associated Press

NORTH PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Wells at a nursery school and a bottling plant near the Woonasquatucket River were tested Friday as part of a widening examination of nearby pollution from dioxin, a probable human carcinogen.

The water is unlikely to be contaminated because the two wells tap into bedrock, an environmental scientist said.

"Dioxin is not very water-soluble and it binds very strongly to soils, so you don't expect it to move very much," said Harold Ward, a professor of environmental science at Brown University in Providence. "I would be very surprised if they found it in bedrock wells."

The EPA planned to test soil Friday at three North Providence locations: a baseball field, the North Providence Boys & Girls Club and Centredale Manor, an apartment building for the disabled and for poor seniors. All are near sites that preliminary test results show have high levels of dioxin.

Also on Friday at Centredale Manor, workers drove posts into the ground for a snow fence to cordon off two areas of dioxin-poisoned dirt.

The river, which runs through industrial neighborhoods from Smithfield south to Providence, has been suspected of pollution for decades.

Bill Sgambato, president Yacht Club Flavored Seltzers, said that during the 1960s, no fish lived in it.

EPA tests in 1996 found fish laden with dioxin. Since then, more tests have found dioxin in riverbed sediment and, in results released Tuesday, on land near the river.

The EPA is trying to determine the source.

At his soda- and water-bottling plant, Sgambato said he is not worried and is glad for the test on the well, which has been in use since 1923.

"I feel fine with it. ... I don't want to sell anything that hurts anyone," he said. "We drink this stuff in our house. We go through three 5-gallon jugs a week. My father is 85 and he's been drinking it since 1935."

Sgambato was worried that hysteria would hurt business.

"I've had people calling me all day," he said. "We're just starting to get on a roll. Then something like this comes along and it can kill you."

The level of danger posed by dioxin is still debated by scientists, said Ward.

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HERALD NEWS
FALL RIVER, MA
DAILY 36,000
FRIDAY
JAN 15 1999
NEWENGLANDNEWSCLIPAGENCY.INC

EPA takes stance on toxin concerns

By PAUL TOLME
Associated Press Writer

EPA

PROVIDENCE — As federal officials worked Thursday to assess the extent of dioxin contamination along the Woonasquatucket River, some were already questioning whether other rivers with similar industrial pasts could also hold dangerous toxins.

The Blackstone River, which runs through Pawtucket and where Samuel Slater founded an expansive mill complex that fed the Industrial Revolution, would appear to have an even greater likelihood of being polluted than the Woonasquatucket, some said.

"The Woonasquatucket should serve as a warning," said John Torgan, spokesman for the environmental group Save the Bay. "It would not be surprising to find other serious levels of dioxins in other urban rivers."

Save the Bay sent a letter to Almond on Thursday asking him to form a committee of state and federal officials to test areas of likely contamination. The committee also should implement a plan to test the soundness of dams, because if one broke, contaminated sediment spread downstream, the environmental group said.

John Rooke, a spokesman for Almond, said the governor has received the letter and that, "Save the Bay raises some very good points.

"We're going to take the suggestions under advisement," Rooke said.

Before other rivers would be tested, officials would first want to determine whether people are eating fish from them, since consuming contaminated fish poses the biggest threat to humans, said Bob Ballou, a spokesman for the Department of Environmental Management.

The state has no sediment testing program and the contamination along the Woonasquatucket was discovered almost by chance, Torgan said. Because of community interest in the river, including efforts to build bike paths and walkways, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offered to get involved and tested fish in 1996.

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Angela Bonarrigo

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Friday, January 15, 1999

Providence Journal 1/15/99

Public floods hot line with dioxin concerns

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- As snowflakes fell on its water, the Woonasquatucket River rolled lazily through three winding miles of this town yesterday.

But in a small room behind the town's zoning department, the pace was hectic, as EPA officials answered nearly non-stop calls from people concerned about exposure to dioxin, the cancer-causing chemical found in the riverbanks. By late yesterday afternoon, more than 200 people had called the hot line, which will be staffed by EPA officials at least through 8 p.m. tonight.

Meanwhile, EPA field teams were preparing to take soil samples from three previously tested sites where high levels of dioxin were found in soil and sediment tests last fall. They will also be testing the wells at a nursery school and a bottled water company.

And as federal and local officials were completing plans for a public information meeting Sunday, Save the Bay sent a letter to Governor Almond urging that the river testing be expanded to the area's other urban rivers.

For years, people have known the Woonasquatucket was dirty and probably polluted. But with the EPA's recent disclosure of dangerous dioxin levels -- and warnings to stay away from the river -- the agency has been swamped with calls from worried parents and frustrated residents who say the pollutants should have been found long ago.

``It's a question of where people draw the line," said Christina Zarcadoolas, a Brown University professor who studies public attitudes toward the environment. ``Once you up the ante a little bit, we expect to see changes in people's perceptions of risk."

People calling the hot line have asked about the health of dogs that play in the river and the dangers of eating vegetables grown in gardens near the river or fish caught in its waters. Others want to know if their well water is safe or whether the river is contaminated in other towns.

``What we're really concerned about is any exposure you may have had to the sediments in the river," Matthew Audet, of the EPA, said to a woman asking whether her children could play outside.

``That's fairly typical," Audet said, hanging up the phone. ``People's concerns [are] about their yards, their kids."

One woman said her boyfriend, who swam in the river near the Lee Romano Little League field when he was young, was recently diagnosed with a rare form of skin cancer that is not caused by exposure to the sun. She was referred to the Department of Health, where she could get more information on that type of cancer and its possible causes.

More

Public floods hot line ... continued

Providence Journal
1/15/99

The standard answer for most callers was that health risks from dioxins are linked to regular and prolonged exposure to the chemical. People were cautioned to keep away from the river area as much as possible. And they were warned of a more common hazard: bacteria- and virus-laden water from sewers that overflow in rainstorms.

Inquiries throughout the day ranged from the predictable to the bizarre. One woman, who said she could not get through to the hot line, called The Journal to ask whether she should be concerned about exposure. She doesn't live in North Providence, she said, but drove through recently looking for a house and figures some dioxins are on her tires.

The hot line also received tips on other sites of pollution along the river, some from workers who claim their employers regularly dumped into the water.

Of course, dumping of chemicals into area rivers received little attention in years past. And as a result, little data is available on possible pollutants.

``Urban rivers are an issue that hasn't really been addressed," said Kristi Rea, city manager for the EPA's Urban Environmental Initiative, in Providence. ``We don't have a set of acceptable standards for urban rivers."

That concern prompted Save the Bay to send a letter to Almond yesterday, asking that he form a task force of state and federal agencies to test the sediments in the state's urban rivers and strengthen aging dams to prevent the release of contaminated sediments.

``With Rhode Island's historic legacy of heavy industry along many of its rivers, the Woonasquatucket is unlikely to be the only river with such problems," said John Torgan, a spokesman for Save the Bay. ``Communities along other rivers may be at risk, but we cannot know until we apply the same scrutiny to those rivers."

Almond reviewed the letter yesterday afternoon, but does not plan to take immediate action. ``They're all good requests," said John Rooke, Almond's deputy director of communications, ``and we're going to take the matter under advisement."

Whether or not work ever starts on other rivers, it won't stop anytime soon on the Woonasquatucket.

EPA field teams today will be taking several soil samples at a senior housing complex, a Little League ball field and outside the Boys & Girls Club, all of which border the river. The new testing at Centredale Manor, housing for the elderly, will tell EPA officials how far the contamination extends, said EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming.

The EPA is still investigating the source of the dioxins.

Water samples will also be taken, as a precaution, from the wells of the Pied Piper Nursery School in Johnston and the Yacht Club Bottling Works in North Providence, Fleming said.

Public floods hot line ... continued

Providence Journal 1/15/99

The final results of the testing done last fall are expected this weekend. With those numbers in hand, the EPA will meet with town and state officials to plan for comprehensive testing of the river area, Fleming said. That testing will be done in February.

The new test results could be released at the public meeting Sunday at 11 a.m. in the Town Hall. It will be attended by the EPA's New England administrator, John P. DeVillars, and several local and state officials. A member of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a division of the Center for Disease Control, will also attend. U.S. Senators Jack Reed and John Chafee and U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy said they plan to be there.

Officials are inviting the public to come and voice concerns, which will be addressed by experts. Meanwhile, area residents have formed their own opinions on the dioxin scare.

Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, for one, said the EPA investigation is much-appreciated, if a bit late. ``Obviously, I would have liked to have seen this type of urgency on the federal agency's part earlier," he said. ``But I think they're being extremely cooperative. They've been excellent to work with."

Kimberly Ballard, a waitress at Andrew's Restaurant across the street from Town Hall, listened to the breakfast crowd talk about the polluted river yesterday morning. ``A lot of them are very upset that they knew about it in 1982, but didn't do anything about it," she said. ``But I think they were more upset about the guy trying to get his pension."

She was speaking of former governor Edward DiPrete.

To be sure, not all were concerned about the contamination. ``We live right across the street from the river," said Robin Bazinet, who was having coffee with a friend. ``I don't walk there, my kids don't play there."

She hadn't heard of the dioxin situation until Wednesday, but didn't see it as a problem ``unless you're going to go over there and drink the water, bathe in it or eat the dirt."

``Personally," she said. ``I think they blew everything out of proportion."

For Robert Giorgi, of Johnston, the Woonasquatucket conjures nothing but thoughts of lazy summer days in his old neighborhood in the 1950s. ``The guys used to swim on one side, and the girls swam on the other side," he said. ``That was our hangout."

Behind the corner market on Woonasquatucket Avenue, there was a tire swing where Giorgi and his buddies would swing out over the river and plunge into the water, which was cool, if not clean. ``It was never really clean," he said. ``There was always some sort of smell on it."

Angela Bonarrigo

EPA-New England Daily News Clips

Thursday, January 14, 1999

Providence Journal 1/14/99

Troubled waters

EPA closes off 3 sections of the Woonasquatucket

By BRIAN D. MOCKENHAUPT
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- With a mix of reassurances and warnings to town residents, federal officials yesterday began laying out a plan to further test and then clean up the Woonasquatucket River, which recent data shows is loaded with dioxins, a chemical believed to cause cancer.

Field teams from the Environmental Protection Agency yesterday closed off sections of the riverfront where high levels of dioxins were found and will begin testing more spots along the river tomorrow, including some residents' back yards.

A local environmental group has also asked that other area rivers, such as the Blackstone, be tested.

State health officials said the dioxins are not an immediate public health risk, but cautioned people to limit their exposure to areas around the river.

``Although this is not an emergency situation, it is one in which immediate action needs to be taken," said North Providence Mayor A. Ralph Mollis after being briefed by EPA officials. ``The message at this point is to avoid the river until we have further information."

Since 1996, when high dioxin levels were first found in the river's fish, signs have been posted warning people not to eat the fish.

But the problem is apparently more serious than EPA officials first thought. Preliminary data from samples collected last fall show high levels of dioxins at three sites along the river, including a housing complex for the elderly and a Little League ball field. Tests at 21 other sites along the river, including spots in Providence, did not show dangerous levels of the chemical.

Mollis has asked the EPA to expand its soil sampling beyond the riverbanks. The EPA does not know how far back from the riverbanks the contamination might extend, nor does the agency know exactly where along the river the chemicals came from. There is no threat to the town's drinking water, which is drawn from the Scituate Reservoir, Mollis said.

The EPA has established a hot line that will be staffed by EPA officials from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. today and tomorrow to answer residents' concerns. (The number is 231-9393.) A second hot-line number is being added today because of the volume of calls received last night.

A public meeting is scheduled Sunday with officials from the EPA, the Department of Environmental Management, the Department of Health, and the governor's office. U.S. Senators Jack Reed and John Chafee and U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy are also expected to attend.

More

Troubled Waters... continued

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Both Chafee and Reed yesterday sent letters to the EPA, urging a speedy resolution of the problem. To clean the river, which was designated one of 14 American Heritage Rivers last summer, ``we will look everywhere we can for the funds to get it done," Reed said.

Also yesterday, two environmental groups -- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility and Rhode Island Clean Water Action -- filed petitions with federal officials urging an immediate cleanup and questioning EPA's response to the dioxin problems.

The groups allege that the EPA knew about dangerous dioxin levels as far back as a year ago, but took insufficient steps to protect the public. A PEER official also claimed that the EPA's actions yesterday were motivated less by a concern for public safety than an embarrassing story in yesterday's New York Times.

EPA officials emphatically denied the allegations. ``That is uninformed and irrational commentary," said John P. DeVillars, the EPA's New England administrator. ``As results have become available to us, we have immediately informed the community and taken fully appropriate precautions."

John Torgan, a spokesman for Save the Bay, yesterday asked that the EPA's work not be limited to the Woonasquatucket River. The problems there, Torgan said, underscore the need to test other rivers, such as the Blackstone, where ``we believe there may be comparable levels of contamination."

Robert Mendoza, director of the EPA's Rhode Island office, said the new testing on the Woonasquatucket is being fast-tracked. While the last round of testing took three months, the next will take a few weeks and should be available shortly thereafter, he said.

Based on those results, the EPA will develop a cleanup plan which could include removing the contaminated soil, Mendoza said. ``It could be years," he said, before the river is clean.

``What do we do with seven miles of rivers where there may be high levels of PCBs, metals and dioxins?" he said. ``We may find a number of things we just don't know about."

State Sen. John Celona, D-North Providence, is concerned that one thing investigators might find is higher cancer rates for area residents. While the EPA tests the river, Celona said, the state Department of Health should conduct a dioxin screening program for people living in the area and determine whether cancer rates in the area are higher than normal. ``It's been well-documented that dioxin is a cancer-causing element," he said. ``I cannot and will not tolerate its existence in my community."

Robert Vanderslice, of the state Department of Health, said that while dioxins have been proven to cause cancer in animals, ``for humans there's still some debate.

``Certainly the problem with dioxins is long-term exposure," Vanderslice said. Bacteria and viruses from area sewers that overflow during storms are a bigger short-term problem, he said. ``You watch a child play, they get dirt on their hands," he said. ``It doesn't stop them from putting their hands in their mouths."

More

Troubled Waters... continued

Providence Journal
1/14/99

As the group was meeting at Town Hall, a field team from the EPA was at Centredale Manor, stretching yellow caution tape along the riverbank. ``We're just trying to err on the side of caution," said Tom Condon, the scene coordinator. Condon's team was also scouting the areas in preparation for a possible cleanup program.

Inside Centredale Manor, there was little concern over the contamination. ``My people don't go into that area," said Ann Vaccaro, the property manager. ``As far as affecting the building, we're on this side of the road. [The residents] don't seem terribly disturbed by it."

Downriver, outside the Boys & Girls Club, Melody Main, of Providence, was picking up her son D.J. from kindergarten. The school borders the Little League field where high levels of dioxins were found.

``What are those dioxins going to do to them? You don't know what to expect," she said as D.J. played nearby, splashing his hands in a mud puddle. ``I don't know really what to think of it. You don't know how much exposure the kids have had."

The school was preparing yesterday to fence off the riverbank, which runs behind the building. ``Even though the risk is of long-term exposure, why take any risk?" said George C. Neubauer, executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Providence, which operates the facility in North Providence.

Neubauer said he requested that the EPA test the soil around the building. Meanwhile, he is preparing a letter for parents telling them about the precautions being taken and urging them to call the hot line with any questions.

John Fitzgerald, 38, grew up down the street, pulling fish, frogs and turtles from the river when he was younger. ``I swam in that river more than you can believe," he said. ``It's gotten cleaner since I was a kid. It's definitely improved."

His mother, Virginia Fitzgerald, said she thought little of letting her son play in the river. She called the recent apprehension over river pollution ``an overreaction."

``They were always in the water, they were always wet," she said. ``Kids fell in, we pulled them out."

With reports from Ariel Sabar, Journal staff writer

Providence Journal
1/14/99

From the pages of The Providence Journal
CONTENTS FEEDBACK SEARCH
Shopping for a mortgage?
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1.14.99 00:01:07

GETTING ANSWERS ABOUT DIOXIN

- A hot line staffed with Environmental Protection Agency officials and health experts can be reached at (401) 231-9393.

The line was open yesterday from 3 to 9 p.m. and will continue from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. today and tomorrow. Additional hours may be scheduled next week, Mayor A. Ralph Mollis said.

- An informational meeting will be held Sunday at 11 a.m. at Town Hall, in the Town Council chambers.

Officials from the EPA, the state Department of Environmental Management, the state Department of Health and other agencies will be available to answer questions. U.S. Senators Jack Reed and John H. Chafee and U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy also plan to attend.

Add Your Two cents on this topic

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Providence Journal
1/14/99

From the pages of The Providence Journal

1.14.99 00:01:07

Chronology

November 1996: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that dioxin, mercury and PCBs have been found in the tissues of fish and eels caught in the Woonasquatucket River.

July 2, 1998: The EPA reports that high levels of the chemicals persist in samples from river sediment.

Aug. 31, 1998: Representatives of the EPA and state Health Department meet with 60 North Providence residents concerned about the chemicals, at the Salvatore Mancini Union Free Library.

Sept. 9, 1998: The EPA takes 45 samples from sites along the river, more than half of them from a two-mile stretch in North Providence.

Dec. 7, 1998: EPA representatives meet again with residents of North Providence, this time at the Centredale Manor home for the elderly.

Jan. 12, 1999: The EPA announces unsafe dioxin levels at three locations in North Providence.

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EPA tests show high levels of dioxin along Woonasquatucket River

Wednesday, January 13, 1999

The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will take steps to keep people away from the Woonasquatucket River after it learned that high levels of cancer-causing dioxin were found in riverbank soil.

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Fences were to be installed in North Providence beginning today and EPA staff will brief residents door-to-door as well as in community meetings on limiting exposure to dioxin.

"Given where some of the locations are, in proximity where humans interact with the river, we felt it was important to move quickly," said EPA spokesman Peyton Fleming.

The agency will consider removing soil in or around the river if final test results from the EPA laboratory in Kansas expected later this month confirm what officials learned Tuesday, Fleming said.

The high levels of contamination were found along riverbanks at Centredale Manor, an elderly housing complex that experiences a flooded parking lot during heavy rains; near the Lee Romano baseball field; and upstream from Allendale Dam, according to a statement from John DeVillars, EPA New England administrator.

The test results are the first to show dioxin in riverfront property where people have contact with the river.

More soil samples of riverfront property are expected to be tested next month.

The EPA has warned against eating fish from the Woonasquatucket since 1996, when studies found dioxin, mercury and PCBs in eels and sunfish. More tests collected in October 1997 showed high levels of dioxin in river sediment behind a half-dozen dams when results came back in July 1998.

"Eating the fish continues to be far and away the biggest health risk," Fleming said.

State health officials in July warned people to wash after touching the water, and to refrain from swimming and wading, to limit exposure to dioxin as well as bacteria washed in from rain-swollen sewers.

In December, officials announced that 100 newly designed warning signs would be posted by spring along the banks of the river, which was once lined with

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Continued

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industrial plants. The signs will use pictures to advise people not to eat the fish, drink the water or swim.

U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., has said he will work with the EPA and other officials to seek federal money to clean up contaminated soil.

This summer, the Woonasquatucket and Blackstone rivers were designated an American Heritage River by President Clinton. The designation will give the rivers extra help in seeking federal funding.

Wednesday, January 13, 1999

NEWPORT DAILY NEWS
NEWPORT, RI
DAILY 14,650
WEDNESDAY
JAN 13 1999
NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC.

EPA finds dioxin in R.I. riverbank

By Janet Kerlin
Associated Press

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WESTERLY SUN
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WEDNESDAY
JAN 13 1999

NEW ENGLAND NEWSCLIP AGENCY, INC

Tests show high levels of dioxins

■ Fences to be installed along river in North Providence.

EPA

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This summer, the Woonasquatucket and Blackstone rivers were designated an American Heritage River by President Clinton.

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From the pages of The Providence Journal
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TOYOTA Newport

9.14.98 06:50:13

Parts of Woonasquatucket closed to fishing

- People are advised not to eat fish caught south of the Smithfield-Johnston line, and to wash with soap after contacting the water.

By KEREN MAHONEY JONES
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH PROVIDENCE -- Technicians from the Environmental Protection Agency were suiting up to test the water of the Woonasquatucket River behind the backstop at Lee Romano field last Wednesday.

The dioxin-tainted river flows just a few feet from the spot where Little Leaguers play.

The agency reported two years ago that dioxins, PCBs and mercury were found in the tissue samples of fish and eels in the river. And on July 2, the agency reported that high levels of the cancer-causing chemicals persist in sediment taken from the river.

The river rises in North Smithfield and runs to Providence, passing through North Providence, where for years textile mills and other industrial plants dumped chemicals into the river.

Dioxins are a byproduct of numerous industrial processes and can be present in pesticide runoff and incinerator emissions. Long-term exposure to dioxins can lead to cancer.

Last week, the EPA took 45 samples from 42 sites along the river. The Woonasquatucket, along with the Blackstone River, was recently named an American Heritage River.

The EPA testers, Sean P. Kennedy and Stella Kiras, donned protective white suits, yellow gloves and boots before walking to the riverbank close to the baseball field in North Providence.

EPA site manager Matthew Audet agreed that the suits look frightening, but said the protective suits are necessary so the workers don't take the sediment home on their own clothes.

The state Department of Health has advised people not to eat fish caught in the Woonasquatucket River south of the Smithfield-Johnston line. In addition, parents are warned to tell their children to wash with soap if they come in contact with the water.

Audet said yesterday that those precautions still stand. He said the contaminated sediment often settles behind dams, which are favored fishing sites.

The testing began at the farthest point downstream, in Providence. The testers worked their way upstream.

He said it is too early to talk about a plan for fixing the problem- plagued river because there is not yet enough information.

Audet said he expects that analyses of the 45 samples taken last week will be available by mid-January. He said the board will hold a meeting, probably in April after the EPA has evaluated health risks, to update residents.

In the meantime, the EPA plans to post 40 warning signs along the river. Earlier in the summer, 17 signs were posted, mostly in the Providence area, by Providence Plan, a semi-autonomous agency.

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