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Environmental News

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EPA Announces Sampling Results for Woonasquatucket River and Centredale Manor

BOSTON - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced the final results of 240 dioxin surface soil samples collected last winter from along a half-mile section of the Woonasquatucket River and Centredale Manor area in North Providence. About half of the samples showed dioxin levels above 1 part per billion, and of those, the majority of the samples were in the range of 1 to 20 ppb.

Three samples showed levels above 50 ppb, with the highest level (117 ppb) being a sample collected from the woods behind Centredale Manor and the second highest (116 ppb) coming from a riverbank sample between Centredale Manor and Brook Village. The third sample, showing 53 ppb, was found just south of Centredale Manor in a vegetated wetland.

Despite the high concentrations, the contaminated areas do not pose an increased health risk to the public since the three areas are all fenced off. The conclusions and recommendations announced last week by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry regarding appropriate precautions to take to avoid dioxin exposure are still appropriate and applicable.

"These surface samples give us a much clearer picture of the extent and nature of the contamination on the Centredale site. The results confirm both the community's and EPA's suspicions of widespread contamination and the need to make this site a priority," said John P. DeVillars, EPA's New England Administrator. "The sampling results are consistent with information we've learned from long-term residents of the community, old photos of the site and the historical use of the property. The highest levels have been found where the bulk of the prior industrial activity occurred, including storage and cleaning of old drums."

"It is obvious from these new results that this issue will continue to require our attention and our aggressive dedication," said North Providence Mayor A. Ralph Mollis, after meeting with EPA officials today on the new results. "Although the urgency and the health risk have not changed, we continue to be concerned and we are one step closer to a plan to eliminate the risks associated with the contamination."

Most of the samples were collected in areas where EPA has already taken steps to restrict access to contaminated areas. Additional fencing will be put up in newly identified areas with dioxin levels above 1 ppb, primarily along the riverbank on the Johnston side of the river across from the Centredale Manor area and in the heavily vegetated wetland below Centredale Manor. The fencing is expected to be put up within a week.

Today's results will guide EPA's next round of sampling which will focus on deeper soils. The subsurface sampling, which began this week, is expected to take several weeks to complete. Subsurface soil samples will be taken at one foot intervals from the surface down to the groundwater table, which is five to six feet below the surface.

Approximately 500 samples will be collected and tested for dioxin. Roughly 25 percent of the samples will also be tested for PCBs and other suspected contaminants. The results will be available in the early fall 1999. The subsurface sampling plan has been reviewed by the Management Action Committee.

"Now that we have a picture of dioxin contamination on the surface of the property, we need to focus our efforts on determining how far down the contamination goes," DeVillars said. "Once we get that information, we'll be in a position to make responsible cleanup decisions."

Copies of the sampling data and subsurface soil sampling plan are available for the public to review at: the Salvatore Mancini Union Free Library, 1810 Mineral Spring Ave., North Providence, and the Marian J. Mohr Library, 1 Memorial Ave., Johnston.

"Residents should remember to avoid the areas of the Woonasquatucket River where we have identified elevated levels of dioxin in the river soils and sediments and not to eat fish caught from the river," DeVillars said.

For health related questions and information, please contact the Family Health Information Line at the Rhode Island Department of Health at: 1-800-942-7434. The Family Information Line operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM. On evenings and weekends, callers may leave a name and telephone number. Hotline staff will return the call on the next business day. In addition, health related questions about dioxin can be directed to Dr. David Hewitt at ATSDR's hotline: 1-800-42-ATSDR.

EPA has established a toll - free tips line so that residents who have knowledge about past activities at the site can come forward with information. The toll-free number is: 888-372-7341.

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