

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



EPA chief lauds river cleanup

Woonasquatucket River project is national model, Whitman says

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NORTH PROVIDENCE -- With the polluted Woonasquatucket River as her backdrop, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Director Christie Whitman yesterday announced that the Bush administration will seek an additional \$150 million from Congress to speed the cleanup of other Superfund sites nationwide.

The requested money would allow the EPA to begin construction at 10 to 15 new sites, Whitman said, as well as complete decontamination efforts at another 10 sites by 2006.

Speaking in North Providence Town Council chambers, Whitman pointed to cleanup of the nearby Woonasquatucket River as an example of successful "collaboration" among state, local and federal agencies.

"We're here because this is an example of what Superfund can do for a community," Whitman said. "... We will work to recreate the cleanup in North Providence in other areas of the country."

While Congress has yet to approve the current year's budget for most federal departments, including the EPA, the agency has been operating on a preliminary budget of about \$1.25 billion. The proposed increase would bring the total requested EPA budget for next year to \$1.39 billion -- and it would be the first increase the department has seen in two years.

While an EPA study published in October reported that seven Superfund sites had gone unfunded in fiscal 2002, Whitman said the requested increase was not a response to that study.

Rather, she said that in the 22 years since the Superfund program was begun, sites have typically grown in size and "complexity," making them more expensive to clean up.

"What we're finding is ... bigger sites, and sites that have a number of chemicals on them," she said.

The proposed increase would allow the department to continue financing projects already under way, even when more urgent sites make greater demands on the agency's time and money, she added.

She could not say, however, how the requested new money would be distributed, or how much of it would come to Rhode Island or North Providence.

Since dioxins and other pollutants were found in the Woonasquatucket River and its banks four years ago, \$10 million in federal

funds have been spent to determine the extent of the contamination and to begin cleanup.

But the money also financed the rebuilding of the Allendale Dam and helped to spur the town's revitalization of the area,
Whitman pointed out.

"You can see how the Superfund can revitalize an urban area and bring it back to life," Whitman said.

U.S. Sen. Lincoln Chafee, who chairs the Subcommittee on Superfund and Waste Management, also spoke at the news conference, as did North Providence Mayor A. Ralph Mollis and Governor Carcieri.

"You only need to look at the [Woonasquatucket] restoration project to see how federal dollars enrich our lives," Carcieri said.