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EPA report finds worst contamination near North Providence apartment complex

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NORTH PROVIDENCE — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided new information Thursday night on pollution along the Woonasquatucket River and the potential costs of cleaning it up.

Federal environmental officials revealed the findings of a remedial investigation to more than 30 residents who gathered at Town Hall.

The agency's investigation found the highest levels of contaminants at a location along the river, just off Smith Street, where two apartment complexes are now in operation. Those complexes are Centredale Manor and Brook Village.

The site was a hub of activity for a former chemical company and a drum recycler, which polluted the area with dioxins during a period from the early 1940s to the early 1970s.

Soil at the main site contained levels of dioxins, PCBs, pesticides, metals and other pollutants that were in excess of environmental standards, according to the EPA.

Most of the contamination was in soils just below paved or capped areas; soils at deeper depths contained less pollution, according to the EPA.

Groundwater monitoring showed contamination that exceeded federal standards at 25 of 37 monitoring wells in the area.

Dioxin was found in groundwater under the Brook Village parking lot, which feeds into the river.

The EPA investigation found lower concentrations of contaminants downstream from the apartment complexes, along the river's path south to Allendale Pond, Lyman Mill Pond and the Lyman Mill Dam.

During the investigation, the pollution threat to habitats for animals and fish on Allendale Pond was gauged at 1,000 times the acceptable level, according to the findings.

The same threat was 100 times the acceptable level for animals and fish at Lyman Mill Pond.

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The EPA expects to present its proposed cleanup plan to the public in the fall, before the agency makes a final decision on how to proceed.

Various short-term environmental projects have already taken place in the area since 2000, when the river, ponds and wetlands were listed as a federal Superfund site.

Contaminated soils were capped or removed entirely from residential properties along the river. Fences were installed around the capped soil. The Allendale Dam was rebuilt.

On Thursday night, EPA officials listed a range of potential cleanup options developed during a preliminary feasibility study.

Under one proposal, the EPA would upgrade or rebuild the existing caps, a project estimated at \$20 million.

Another proposal involves excavating 56,000 to 160,000 cubic yards of polluted sediments.

Digging up the sediment and putting it in a disposal facility nearby would cost \$35 million to \$65 million, while hauling it off-site for disposal could cost as much as \$120 million.

Mayor Charles A. Lombardi said he hopes he can go swimming in the river someday.

"We're excited," he said, referring to the cleanup. "The sooner the better."

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