

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

2 Martin Luther King Jr., Dr., Suite 1152 East Tower, Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Chris Clark, Commissioner
F. Allen Barnes, Director
Environmental Protection Division
(404) 656-4713

For Immediate Release

August 4, 2010

Laboratory tests showed today that one water sample from the North Oconee River downstream from a chemical plant fire in Athens-Clarke County contained para-dichlorobenzene, but there was no evidence of the chemical in five other river water samples, according to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).

The sample testing positive for para-dichlorobenzene was taken at the confluence of Trail Creek and the North Oconee River and was detected in a concentration of 210 parts per billion (ppb). The Instream Water Quality standard is 190 ppb.

Runoff from the fire at J&J Chemical Co. on July 28 contaminated the nearby East Fork of Trail Creek and Trail Creek with perfume oils, non-toxic blue dye, and the chemicals para-dichlorobenzene and formaldehyde. Dead fish were found in the two creeks, but aquatic life in the rivers appears to be healthy.

EPD tested water taken at six locations in the North Oconee and Oconee rivers and will continue to test stream and river water quality. The river testing locations are:

- Trail Creek at confluence to the North Oconee River
- Whitehall Road at North Oconee River
- College Station Road at North Oconee River
- Barnett Shoals Road at Oconee River
- Greene County GA SR 15 on Oconee River
- North Oconee River upstream of Trail Creek confluence

Tests results for formaldehyde should be available early next week. The blue dye is used in the production of toilet bowl cleaner. The stream water was colored bright blue earlier in the week, and although the color is beginning to fade, EPD continues to recommend that citizens avoid contact with the water in the East Fork of Trail Creek and Trail Creek. The odor associated with the color is also becoming less intense.

The closest public drinking water intake is for the city of Greensboro and is located approximately 23 miles from the chemical plant site and across a portion of Lake Oconee. While it is unlikely the contaminants will travel that far, the city of Greensboro took samples today of both treated and untreated drinking water and sent them to the EPD lab for analysis.

A representative from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assessed the area with an EPD field team today. The federal agency said EPD's response to the incident is the same as what EPA would have done and no further EPA involvement at the site is needed.

News Media Contact: Kevin Chambers (404) 651-7970