



NEW MEXICO
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT



Office of the Secretary

BILL RICHARDSON
Governor
DIANE DENISH
Lieutenant Governor

Harold Runnels Building
1190 Saint Francis Drive (87505)
PO Box 5469, Santa Fe, NM 87502-5469
Phone (505) 827-2855 Fax (505) 827-2836
www.nmenv.state.nm.us

RON CURRY
Secretary
SARAH COTTRELL
Deputy Secretary

April 19, 2010
For Immediate Release

Contact: Marissa Stone Bardino, NMED Communications Director
(505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475

**Environment Department Finds Elevated Levels of PCBs in the Rio Grande near
Albuquerque during Storm Flows**

Levels Do Not Pose Immediate Health Threats for Residents

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) released results of a study conducted in 2009 of Rio Grande water quality near the Santa Fe Buckman Direct Diversion and in Albuquerque during storm flow conditions.

The study indicates that Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) derived contaminants were not found to be influencing water quality at the Buckman Direct Diversion or upstream from the Albuquerque surface water treatment facility inlet during regional storm events. The concentrations are well below established state and federal standards for PCBs in drinking water and do not represent a threat to Albuquerque's municipal drinking water supply.

"We have continued our work testing water from the Rio Grande to ensure public health is protected," said New Mexico Environment Department Deputy Secretary Sarah Cottrell. "Studies of the water indicate it does not pose immediate health threats for residents. State and local agencies will continue to work together to guard the well-being of citizens and wildlife."

However, the study indicates that storm water events in the Albuquerque area have the potential to carry concentrations of PCBs into the Rio Grande that can harm wildlife and humans consuming PCB contaminated fish.

The Albuquerque sampling location was included in the study to answer questions about the potential for LANL contaminants to impact the Rio Grande near Albuquerque's drinking water supply diversion. In 2009, NMED conducted a series of listening sessions throughout the state to help define environmental concerns of citizens. In response to citizens' concerns, NMED collected samples from five Rio Grande locations including the river upstream of the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority surface water treatment facility inlet. Sample collection reflected conditions representing normal river flow and flow following storm events in which more suspended sediments, and therefore more contaminants associated with sediments, could be present.

Since the focus of the sampling events was river water, it is not known at this time if the contaminants were present in the stormwater itself or if the volume and velocity of the stormwater flow disturbed contaminants already present and bound in sediments.

The PCBs measured in water collected from the Rio Grande during high flow storm water events were below the maximum contaminant level (MCL) established in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) standards for drinking water but were above the state human health and wildlife habitat criteria for surface waters in New Mexico. The MCL for PCBs in drinking water is derived from determinations of increased cancer risks per million people consuming a specified amount of water per day over a 70-year timeframe. The state human health criterion is based upon human consumption of fish and other aquatic life that bio-accumulate contaminants over time. The wildlife habitat criterion is determined based upon health risk to aquatic life living in the surface water. Regular testing of Albuquerque's municipal water supply using EPA authorized methods has not revealed the presence of PCBs.

In conjunction with the New Mexico Department of Health and the Department of Game and Fish, NMED publishes fish consumption advisories for the stretch of the Rio Grande between I-25 to the south and US 550 to the north specifically because of PCB contamination. The advisories indicate that white bass from this area should not be consumed, and channel catfish between 14 and 18 inches should not be consumed more than three times per month. Fish advisories may be found on the NMED website at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/swqb/advisories/> and also in the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish fishing proclamation.

PCBs belong to a broad family of human-made organic chemicals known as chlorinated hydrocarbons and were manufactured domestically in the United States from 1929 until their manufacture was banned in 1979. They have a range of toxicity and vary in consistency from thin, light colored liquids to yellow or black waxy solids. Due to their non-flammability, chemical stability, high boiling point, and electrical insulating properties, PCBs were used in hundreds of industrial and commercial applications including electrical, heat transfer, and hydraulic equipment; as plasticizers in paints, plastics, and rubber products; in pigments, dyes and carbonless copy paper; and in many other industrial applications.

PCBs are ubiquitous in the environment and can be detected in very low concentrations in nearly everything from precipitation in remote areas to ultra clean laboratory glassware. PCBs cycle between air, water, and soil and can accumulate in the leaves and above-ground parts of plants and food crops. They are also taken up into the bodies of small organisms and fish.

PCBs have low solubility in water and tend to bind to organic matter in sediments with preference for finer grained material (fine sediments as opposed to coarse sediments such as sand). Surface water treatment plants are designed to be especially good at removing sediments from drinking water.

Previous studies conducted since 2003 by local storm water management agencies (AMAFCA, City of Albuquerque, NMDOT and UNM) have included testing for PCBs in Albuquerque storm water conveyances several times a year at five locations. Local agencies have not detected PCBs in stormwater. NMED samples collected during this study were analyzed using a more recent test method that can measure significantly lower concentrations of PCBs to determine whether state surface water standards for wildlife habitat and human health have been met. NMED continues to coordinate with city, county, and other municipal agencies to determine the sources of PCBs so that source control measures can be implemented.

For more information please contact Marissa Stone Bardino at (505) 827-0314.

###