

MEDIA RELEASE

SAN JUAN BASIN
public health

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San Juan Basin Health Reports on Animas River Sediment Testing Results

Durango, Colo.— San Juan Basin Health (SJBH) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) completed their summer testing of sediment in the Animas River. Results showed that metals in sediment remain at safe levels for typical recreational use of the river.

SJBH and CDPHE took 67 samples over this period and analyzed each one for the levels of thirteen different metals, providing 871 individual results. None of these data points indicated an unsafe level for river recreation. The metals studied include lead, arsenic, cadmium, uranium and nine others that can create a risk of health problems if present in sediment at high enough levels.

SJBH and CDPHE took weekly sediment samples at four locations from Silverton to Durango, and monthly samples at five popular recreational areas within Durango city limits, as part of CDPHE's comprehensive Long-Term Monitoring Plan for the Animas River. This plan was created in response to community concerns about public health impacts from the presence of metals in the river. Laboratory analysis of samples taken from April through August, as metals moved downstream in high runoff, is now complete.

The established safe levels for recreation are based on the impact of ten to twenty years of repeated accidental ingestion of sediment. This is a conservative level of comparison for most typical recreational users, but individuals should still take common-sense precautions:

- Do not deliberately swallow sediment on any river bank or beach.
- Parents should closely supervise their children when using beaches to prevent them from eating large amounts of sediment.
- It is always good public health practice to wash with soap and water after exposure to untreated river water or sediment.

The complete data set for sediment and water quality can be accessed at www.colorado.gov/cdphe/animas-river-water-quality-sampling-and-data, and tools to help interpret data are available at <http://sjbhd.org/public-health-news/animas-river-health-updates/>. Overall, the 2016 data are consistent with the historical state of the river: metals are present in the Animas River at different levels throughout the year. These levels tend to impact fish habitat but are always at a safe level for recreation. Furthermore, recent testing confirmed Animas River fish are safe to eat and have levels of metals consistent with fish from around the state. The fish

tissue report can be accessed here:

https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/WQ_Fish-Tissue-RR-incl-03-16.pdf

While the recreation season is coming to a close, SJBH and CDPHE will continue sampling water and sediment to evaluate risks to human and environmental health over the winter and through next year's runoff, until August 2017.

San Juan Basin Health is a local public health agency, governed by a seven member local Board of Health, serving all residents of La Plata and Archuleta counties. For close to 70 years, San Juan Basin Health has improved the health and environment of the Southwest Colorado community.

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