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Niantic River to be used to monitor pollutant

HARTFORD — The Niantic River is one of the new sites at which the state will now monitor a highly toxic industrial pollutant, polychlorinated biphenyls PCB, the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) said Tuesday.

The department operates 43 monitoring sites and will now also start taking fish and bottom sediment samples from eight new sites, including the Niantic River. The other new sites are: the Park River in Hartford, the Quinnipiac River in Meriden, the Still River in Danbury, the Connecticut River, the upper Housatonic River, Lake Lillinoah and Stamford Harbor, a DEP official said.

Officials said the chemical was widely used in Connecticut industry for such things as carbonless carbon paper and fluorescent lamps. But now only one state firm, Universal Manufacturing Co. in Bridgeport, uses the chemical, they said. The company makes transformers and capcitors.

Officials said, however, the chemical's residue remains in the environment for decades. They said traces of the chemical are often found around landfills and incinerators where products made with PCP were disposed.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is currently checking for PCB at several New England dumps, Bridgeport Hydraulic Co. Housatonic River wells and two Massachusetts water company operations.

A previous check of the river wells by the state found no traces of the chemical.

Scientists say the chemical can cause skin disorders and reproductive failure in humans and is suspected of causing liver cancer in laboratory animals.

"Based on results we will determine whether any additional controls are necessary to prevent PCB from entering our waters," state Environmental Protection Commissioner Joseph N. Gill said.