

# **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY LIFTED ON BLACKWATER AND NOTTOWAY RIVERS**

(Richmond, Va.) — The Virginia Department of Health today lifted its seven-year-old advisory on eating fish from the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers near Franklin.

A public health advisory was issued in September 1990 warning people to limit or discontinue eating bottom-feeding fish caught in the Blackwater River from Sandy Landing to approximately five miles downstream at the confluence with the Nottoway River at the North Carolina border, and for approximately three miles of the Nottoway River downstream from the General Vaughan Bridge (US Rt. 258) to the North Carolina border. Based on animal studies and theoretical models, eating fish contaminated with dioxin may result in a slight increase in a lifetime risk of cancer. Epidemiologic studies have not shown a carcinogenic effect in humans, but results are inadequate for ruling out such a link.

“The health advisory was based on 1990 monitoring data which clearly showed dioxin contamination in discharges from Union Camp Corporation’s Franklin paper mill and in channel catfish,” said State Health Commissioner Randolph L. Gordon, M.D., M.P.H. “Since then, Union Camp has demonstrated its commitment to remove dioxin from its discharges by changing its bleaching process, and as a result, we can remove the advisory against eating the fish caught from the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers.”

Since 1990, Union Camp has modified its processes at a cost of \$150 million by using ozone instead of chlorine as a bleaching agent. The use of ozone virtually eliminates chlorinated organic compounds such as dioxin in the effluent. As a result of the change, dioxin levels in effluent discharges have been below the limit of detection since 1992 and dioxin levels in fish have also been gradually decreasing.

Union Camp, through an independent laboratory, has continuously monitored the levels of dioxin in fish along these stretches of the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers since the advisory was issued. The health department has reviewed the Union Camp fish sampling data which have been independently verified by the Department of Environmental Quality. The data indicate that since 1994, dioxin levels in fish tissue have been consistently very low and the consumption of fish at these levels would not be considered a potential public health threat.

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