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For Immediate Release

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Initial water testing shows that runoff from a chemical plant fire last week in Athens-Clarke County contaminated nearby creeks, but did not have a significant impact on the North Oconee River, according to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).

Firefighters poured an estimated 1.5 million gallons of water on the fire at J&J Chemical Co. early Wednesday. The runoff mixed with perfume oils, non-toxic blue dye, and the chemicals para-dichlorobenzene and formaldehyde before flowing into the East Fork Creek, which feeds into Trail Creek. Fish were killed in the creeks, but aquatic life in the river does not seem to have been affected.

EPD will continue to monitor water quality at six locations this week. The 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

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, EPD is working with Greensboro officials to insure that drinking water supplies are safe.

The blue dye is used in the production of a toilet bowl cleaner. It will gradually become diluted and dissipate in the sunlight, but some of it collected in shady wetlands along the creeks and will continue to be visible. Although local residents have complained of a perfume-like odor, which may irritate eyes and respiratory systems, air quality testing conducted on Monday did not detect any pollutants that would cause a long-term health impact.

Representatives from the EPD Hazardous Waste Management Program were at the chemical plant site today to oversee removal of contaminated soil and to insure that steps are taken to prevent any further runoff into the nearby creeks.

EPD recommends that citizens avoid contact with water along the East Fork of Trail Creek and Trail Creek to the confluence at the North Oconee River pending results of further testing.

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