

Date: April 14, 2017
Contact: Claire Ninde
(970) 335-2044
communications@sjbpublichealth.org

Animas River Spring Runoff Update

Durango, Colo. - Colorado's heavy winter snowpack has begun to melt, and river flows throughout the Animas River watershed are on the rise. Every spring, the Animas River experiences runoff that causes naturally occurring sediments to be transported downstream. Some of these sediments originate in the San Juan Mountains and are naturally high in certain heavy metals. This may cause the river to display a cloudy, turbid appearance or a change in color. This natural process occurs every spring and is closely monitored by San Juan Basin Public Health (SJBPH), San Juan County, the United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

As of April 1st, these agencies reinstalled continuous water quality monitoring technology at five locations in the Animas River and its major tributaries. These stations allow public health officials, emergency managers, and the general public to view several indicators of river water quality around the clock. The stations' live feeds can be accessed from this address:

<https://co.water.usgs.gov/infodata/Animas/index.html>.

In addition, the agencies have begun frequently sampling water and sediment at six locations in the Animas River watershed. These samples are analyzed at a laboratory to determine the levels of various heavy metals present in river water and sediment. Data indicate that this should be a normal spring runoff, and the public should see no impacts to human or environmental health from normal recreational use of the Animas River. Of course, it is always wise to take certain precautions to protect your health when recreating in the wild:

Tips for River Users:

- It is always a good public health practice to wash with soap and water after exposure to untreated river water or sediment.
- Because children sometimes ingest water and soil when playing in or around the river, they should be supervised closely to limit their exposure to untreated water or sediments.
- When using any river or stream as water source be sure to properly treat water before consumption.
- Rinsing fishing and boating equipment after each use is always a good practice.

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

###