

# Fish Kill Triggers Riverwood Water Emergency

## *Severe Water Rationing in Effect*



Soon after discovering the fish kill, Riverwood High School students returned to the river to investigate.

BY LORI KATZ

*Riverwood News Staff Reporter*

Citing possible health hazards, Mayor Edward Cisko announced today that Riverwood will stop withdrawing water from the Snake River and will temporarily shut down the city's water-treatment plant over water-quality concerns provoked by a massive fish kill. Starting at 6 p.m., river water will not be pumped to the plant for at least three days. If the cause of the fish kill has not been determined and corrected by that time, the shutdown will continue indefinitely.

During the plant shutdown, water engineers and chemists from the county sanitation commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will investigate the cause of the major fish kill discovered yesterday. The fish kill extended from the base of Snake River Dam, located upstream from

Riverwood, to the town's water-pumping station.

The initial alarm was sounded when Jane Abelson, 15, and Chad Wong, 16—both students at Riverwood High School—found many dead fish floating in a favorite fishing spot. "We thought maybe someone had poured poison into the reservoir," explained Wong.

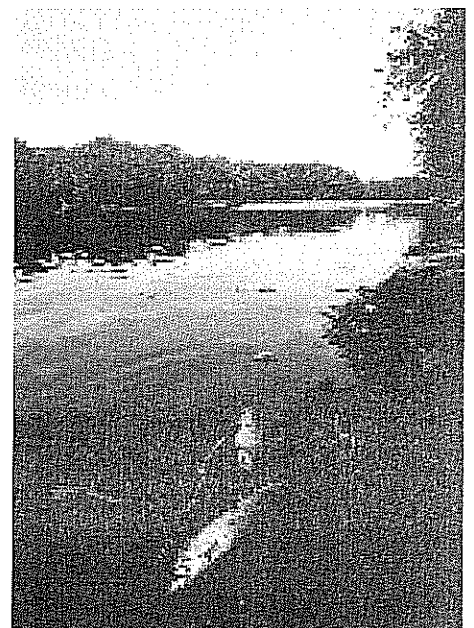
Mary Steiner, a Riverwood High School biology teacher, accompanied the students back to the river. "We hiked downstream for almost a mile. Dead fish of all kinds were washed up on the banks and caught in the rocks," Abelson reported.

Ms. Steiner contacted county sanitation commission officers, who immediately collected Snake River water samples for analysis. Chief engineer Hal Cooper reported at last night's emergency meeting that the water samples appeared clear, colorless, and odorless. However, he indi-

cated some concern. "We can't say for certain that the water supply is safe until the cause of the fish kill is determined. It's far better that we take no chances until then," Cooper advised.

Mayor Cisko canceled the community's "Fall Fish-In," which was scheduled to start September 15. No plans to reschedule Riverwood's annual fishing tournament were announced. "The decision was made at last night's emergency town council meeting to start investigating the situation immediately," he said.

After five hours of often-heated debate yesterday, the Riverwood town council finally reached agreement to stop drawing water from the Snake River. Council member Henry McLatchen (also a chamber of commerce member) commented that the decision was highly emotional and unnecessary. He cited financial losses



Dead fish washed up along the banks of the Snake River yesterday afternoon.

**Fish Kill, from page 1**

that motels and restaurants will suffer because of the Fish-In cancellation, as well as potential loss of future tourism dollars due to adverse publicity. However, McLatchen and other council members sharing that view were outvoted by those holding the position that the fish kill, the only one within Riverwood's recorded history, may indicate a public health emergency.

Mayor Cisko assured residents that essential municipal services will not be affected by the crisis. For example, he promised to maintain fire department access to adequate supplies of water to meet firefighting needs.

Arrangements have been made to transport emergency drinking water from Mapleton. The first water shipments by truck are due to arrive in Riverwood by midmorning tomorrow. Distribution points are listed in Section 2 of today's *Riverwood News*, along with guidelines on conserving water during this emergency.

All Riverwood schools will be closed Monday and possibly through Wednesday. No other closings or cancellations have been announced. Local TV and radio will report any schedule changes as they become available.

A public meeting tonight at 8 p.m. at the town hall features Dr. Margaret Brooke, a water expert at State University. She will answer questions concerning water safety and use. Brooke was invited by the county sanitation commission to help clarify the situation for concerned citizens.

Asked how long the water emergency would last, Brooke refused to speculate, saying that she first needed to talk to other scientists conducting the investigation. EPA investigators, in addition to collecting and analyzing water samples, will examine dead fish in an effort to determine what was responsible for the fish kill. Brooke reported that trends or irregularities in water-quality data from Snake River monitoring during the past two years also will play a part in the investigation.

