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For Immediate Release

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Cleanup work at the site of a burned chemical plant in Athens-Clarke County is progressing and the latest water tests show levels of chemicals in a nearby waterway continue to drop, according to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).

The J&J Chemical Co. building has been demolished and removed, and any materials that remained in the damaged structure have been placed in roll-off containers. The concrete pad where the building once stood also has been broken up.

Proper disposal of the building contents is included in a proposed remediation plan the company sent to EPD today. The plan also addresses soil testing and remediation at the plant site, as well as sediment testing in the creek. EPD will review the plan and respond to the company early next week.

The plant caught fire July 28 and runoff from the firefighting carried the chemicals para-dichlorobenzene and formaldehyde into nearby Trail Creek, which flows into the North Oconee and Oconee rivers. The runoff also contained a non-toxic blue dye, which the company used to produce a toilet bowl cleaner.

Under the terms of an EPD consent order issued last week, the company has agreed to monitor water quality in Trail Creek twice weekly until contaminants are no longer detected. J&J Chemical also agreed to pump contaminated runoff from the creek through activated carbon filters and to capture all runoff from the property. The carbon filters were shut down earlier in the week due to high water levels from rain, but have since been restarted.

EPD testing of water samples taken from Trail Creek last Monday detected para-dichlorobenzene at 290 parts per billion (ppb) at Olympic Drive and 16 ppb at Dudley Park. Formaldehyde levels were 150 and 100 ppb at Olympic Drive and Dudley Park, respectively. The chemical concentrations at that level do not pose a health threat, but EPD will continue to recommend people and pets stay out of the creek water until tests show the chemicals are gone. Testing of water samples taken from the North Oconee and Oconee rivers continue to show no evidence of formaldehyde.

An EPD field crew reported the blue color in most areas has faded, but a slight odor from the toilet cleaner lingers along slow stretches of the creek.

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