

About the South River Science Team

Between 1929 and 1950, mercury from industrial processes at the DuPont plant in Waynesboro, Virginia, entered the South River. Upon discovery of mercury in the river system in the 1970s, the Virginia Department of Health issued advisories for fish consumption along the South River and on the South Fork Shenandoah River.

In 1984, Virginia officials and DuPont agreed to a settlement to compensate the state for damages to natural resources. DuPont paid a penalty and established a state-administered trust fund to support a 100-year mercury-monitoring program for fish, water, and river sediment. The monitoring program is administered today by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).



An aerial photo shows the former DuPont plant. The South River is on the right side of the photo.



Members of the South River Science Team gather in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Experts initially predicted that mercury levels in the South River would decline over time; however, data collected during the 1990s indicated that mercury levels were remaining stable rather than declining. As a result, the DEQ and DuPont established a team of stakeholders to use their collective science and policy expertise to research local mercury contamination. The team's long-term objectives are to make fish consumption safer, communicate current risks to river users, and protect public health. This group, known as the South River Science Team, includes representatives from the Virginia DEQ, Department of Health, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, DuPont, citizens groups, and several universities and private researchers.

In 2006, the Science Team opened an office in Waynesboro. The front part of the office contains meeting space and exhibits and is open to the public; the back part of the office is used by the Science Team to support its various activities.

Today, the Science Team continues to focus on solving the environmental challenges of the South River and to stress the importance of the river in the community. To solve the technical challenges that mercury presents, the Science Team meets several times per year and sponsors an annual symposium involving South River researchers and internationally recognized mercury experts. This expert panel evaluates South River data, field activities, and proposals for future work – all with an eye toward identifying, managing, and reducing risks to the public from mercury contamination. As part of its education and community involvement mission, Science Team members participate in many local activities, including the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival and Riverfest. Through these efforts, members communicate the importance of the river and its resources and the role of stressors like mercury.



The Science Team office is located at 508 West Main Street in Waynesboro.

Contacts

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