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Fungicide found in river and city water

State and federal officials are investigating a fish kill on the Mills River on July 27 which claimed hundreds of fish, including this redhorse found near the intersection of N.C. 280 and South Mills River Road. Scott Parrott / Times-News FILE

Test results confirmed an agricultural fungicide was present in the Mills River the day neighbors along the Henderson County stream found fish floating belly up.

By [Scott Parrott](#)

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MILLS RIVER -- Test results confirmed an agricultural fungicide was present in the Mills River on July 27, the day neighbors along the Henderson County stream found fish floating belly up. Test results also confirmed the fungicide's presence in the Hendersonville water supply, but in such low concentrations someone could drink the tainted water every day for years before becoming ill, according to the state lab. The Division of Water Quality is not officially placing the blame for the fish kill on the fungicide until the final lab report comes back, an official said. The fungicide, chlorothalonil, is used to control fungi that threaten vegetables, trees, small fruits and other agricultural crops. The contamination affected the Mills River and its south fork, killing fish and threatening the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel and water supplies for Hendersonville and Asheville. Regular water samples at the Hendersonville treatment plant showed nothing out of the ordinary shortly after the fish kill. Employees also collected treated water samples for more in-depth analysis at the state labs to determine whether the contaminants could be detected in the city's drinking water. Dr. Luanne Williams of the N.C. Division of Public Health told the city that chlorothalonil was found in the sample at 2.8 parts per billion, according to a press release. It was the only chemical found, she said. "Health effects would not be expected for individuals drinking two liters of water a day at this level ... every day for several years," Williams said, according to the press release. The level was also below U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards for infants, she wrote. "I would not expect health effects for an infant drinking one liter of water daily," Williams wrote. Follow up samples were collected at Hendersonville's water treatment plant Thursday to determine whether the fungicide is still present in the city's water supply. The results of the tests are expected this week. The N.C. Division of Water Quality sampled three sites after the fish kill. A sample from a mud puddle in a tomato field on South Mills River Road contained 309 micrograms of chlorothalonil per liter. Environmental Engineer Roy M. Davis explained the concentration using ping pong balls, saying it would be like 309 out of 1 billion ping pong balls. The sample from the mud puddle also contained the herbicide metribuzin, but the herbicide was not found in the river. The test results told Davis "Something took place in that field that allowed pesticides to go to the South Fork of the Mills River. What that something was, I do not know," he said. A Division of Water Quality employee will return to the South Fork today to study the bug population below the tomato field above Old Homeplace Lane on South Mills River Road, Davis said. "It's a good way to tell what kind of impacts took place to

a stream," he said. "The fish depend upon the bugs for their food source, and the impacts to the bug population tell you something about the impacts to the fish population."The Division of Water Quality awaits the remainder of the sample analysis from the laboratory, he said."One of the things that we would need to decide (is) if a person violating water quality standards is subject to civil penalty," Davis said. "What we'd have to decide is do we have enough information to convince a reasonable person that we can identify the person causing the fish kill."The Division of Water Quality collected the third sample from a five-day holding pond used by the Asheville water plant, Davis said. Tests found 0.1 micrograms per liter.U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists believe the federally endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel weathered the contamination of the Mills River.

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