



# National Environment & Planning Agency

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Website: <http://www.nepa.gov.jm>

Attention: All News Editors

KINGSTON, Jamaica

(25 October 2024):

## **NEPA empowers communities to assist with safeguarding Rio Cobre**

**The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) recently facilitated the training of 28 individuals as river wardens to provide the agency with timely alerts to incidents of pollution of the Rio Cobre in St. Catherine and to enable an immediate assessment of suspected pollutants.**

The residents hailed from the communities of Church Road, Linstead, Bog Walk, Kent Village, Zephyrton and Pleasant Hill. A community action group known as Friends of Rio Cobre was also present at the training as well as vendors who operate along the roadway and fisherfolk who are economically dependent on the river.

Participants were trained in water sampling techniques, identifying pollutants and other abnormalities, the impact of pollution and invasive species on the health of the river, the rudiments of the Wild Life Protection Act, the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) Act and NEPA's enforcement procedures.

Senior Manager for Environmental Management at NEPA, Mr. Richard Nelson explained that "the river wardens will act as NEPA's eyes and ears on the ground, so to speak, and are expected to monitor the Rio Cobre for any trace of abnormalities". He added that they are required to "report suspected pollution to NEPA and may assist the agency's investigation by collecting samples before the evidence is lost or compromised prior to NEPA's arrival on the scene".

"These stakeholders are not only empowered to become river wardens, but they are now more aware of the effects of pollution on their communities and are now more enlightened in identifying issues and in adopting good environmental practices that can safeguard their surroundings. The enthusiasm of the participants is commendable, and they seemed committed to the task at hand".

According to Mr. Nelson, the river warden training is part of a broader initiative to safeguard the Rio Cobre and represents the second phase in the implementation of an early warning system in the area. The first phase, he pointed out was the installation of eight large street signs at various points along the river which bear the dedicated emergency contact details for persons to use to report a suspected pollution incident. Additionally, the senior manager said that work has already commenced on a third phase, which is to introduce a multi-parameter water quality monitoring technology that would allow the agency to easily detect elevated levels of pollutants and possibly the source of such contaminants along the river in real time. "Once a parameter

reaches a critical level, the remote electronic monitoring system will notify NEPA”, he explained.

Mr. Nelson added further that the agency’s technocrats have accumulated crucial data from their years of activity in the area which would help NEPA to readily match pollutants to the various economic activities that operate along the river. “This data is invaluable in helping NEPA to match the pollution detected by the remote monitoring technology to its source”, Nelson asserted.

The senior manager emphasized that the early warning system is useful to stakeholders who depend on the river such as the National Water Commission (NWC), the National Irrigation Commission (NIC), fisherfolk and recreational users as they can be notified on a timely basis of possible contamination and can take the necessary mitigation measure much sooner.

Giving his response to the training, Dwight Bethune, a resident of Pleasant Hill explained that he attended the workshop as he is passionate about his environment. He added that “communities need more things like these to get more young people involved in caring about the environment”. Meanwhile, Mr. Kestonard Gordon Vice Chairman of the St Catherine Parish Development Committee, in his response, noted that, “the workshop was useful and informative and a good method for integrating the various communities and state Agencies to establish cooperation and understanding.”



**Persons trained as river wardens proudly display their samples collected from the Rio Cobre as part of their training on sample collection technique.**



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