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**Contact:**

Rich Cogen, Executive Director

Ohio River Foundation

513-460-3365

[rcogen@ohioriverfdn.org](mailto:rcogen@ohioriverfdn.org)

**Flooding raises concerns about Ohio River pollution, threats to water quality standards**

CINCINNATI, OHIO (Feb. 28, 2018) – As the Ohio River crested at over 60.5 feet, Cincinnati residents watched water slowly take over roads and parks, basements and garages.

It's important to note, though, that the problem goes beyond just having too much water and the resulting inconveniences. What's *in* that water should also be of concern.

"This is Ohio River water that has not been treated," said Rich Cogen, executive director of the Ohio River Foundation (ORF), a nonprofit dedicated to protecting and improving water quality and ecology in the region. "People need to be aware that there is pollution associated with flooding and take the necessary precautions to make sure that they are safe and their families are safe."

Cincinnati has a combined sewer system, wherein rainwater and sewage go into the same pipe. High volumes of water like the area has been experiencing can lead to overflows, with the water bypassing treatment plants. When that happens, both sewage and runoff from homes and industries, which can include chemicals such as fertilizers and mercury, flow back into the Ohio River untreated.

On top of that, floodwaters flowing into places such as junkyards, industrial sites, roadways, and garages, where all sorts of objects and hazardous materials ranging from cleaners to oil to pesticides collect or are stored, carry those items back to the river.

All of this means residents should exercise caution when dealing with cleanup or attempting to wade through high waters, where sewage, chemicals and floating objects could be present.

As the waters slowly recede, they are taking some of these hazards with them. That means pollution and the resulting negative impacts on people and ecosystems are a concern both locally and downriver.

“The fact that the river is flooding shines a spotlight on the need for pollution control standards for the entire river,” Cogen said. “Unfortunately, the agency charged with writing those standards, the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO), is taking a step back from its responsibility.”

Cogen is referring to a proposal to revise the water control agency responsibilities, eliminating pollution control standards for the Ohio River and allowing ORSANCO to stop ensuring its consistent water quality. One of the reasons ORSANCO was set up to fill that role back in 1948 was to ensure that pollution dumped into the river in one state wouldn't flow into and impact other states downriver. A coalition of environmental groups and some ORSANCO commissioners are urging against the changes, which could affect drinking water for four million people. This week, the groups, which include ORF, [issued a press release](#) expressing their concerns.

“With agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [predicting increased rainfall and the potential for more flooding in the region in coming decades](#) because of climate change, now is not the time for ORSANCO to abandon its role as the river's watchdog,” Cogen said.

### **About Ohio River Foundation**

Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and all waters in its 11-state watershed. ORF works towards these goals through environmental education and conservation activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens. For more information, or to become a member, visit [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org).