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Beach advisory issued in Port Charlotte after sewage spill

Story Created: May 06, 2010 at 5:57 PM

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PORT CHARLOTTE - A precautionary advisory for high levels of bacteria has been issued for the beach at Port Charlotte Beach Park, and swimming is not recommended at the site.

The county Health Department issued the advisory late Wednesday. The department said a Charlotte County Utilities line broke Tuesday night and spilled more than 10,000 gallons of raw sewage into the Fordham Waterway off Conway Boulevard. The waterway flows by the beach.

The department is awaiting test results on water samples taken Wednesday night and Thursday morning, said environmental supervisor Scott Schermerhorn. If the samples are fairly clear, then dilution has solved the problem and the advisory will be lifted, he said. If the bacteria counts are high, the advisory and testing will continue until levels are at the acceptable standards of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The beach area should be considered a potential health risk to bathers, the department said. If high concentrations of the bacteria are ingested or enter through an open cut or sore, they may cause disease or infection. The most common symptoms include rashes, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting.

The presence of enteric bacteria can indicate fecal pollution.

James Huish, operations manager for CCU, said a resident reported the broken main about 7:15 p.m. Tuesday, and the pipe was repaired by 10 p.m. He said a six-inch pipeline that was extended through a storm drainage structure had an old steel repair clamp on it, indicating a previous leak. He suspects saltwater deteriorated the clamp and it gave way, causing the spill.

Huish said the pipe had a three-inch hole inside and was replaced with a new PVC pipe. CCU does not anticipate any more problems with it.

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