

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release—October 28, 2010 Contact person: Bob Lewis 301-862-3517

## HEALTH ADVISORY LIFTED AFTER SPILL 45,000+ GALLONS RAW SEWERAGE FLOW INTO FISHERMEN'S CREEK & ST. MARY'S RIVER

OCTOBER 28, 2010—The St. Mary's County Department of Health ended the health advisory this morning for the waters of Fishermen's Creek and the Horseshoe Bend section of the tidal St. Mary's River. Health Department officials told St. Mary's College officials that a one-time test for Enterococcus was 4cfu, well below the 104cfu standard set by Maryland Department of Environment. Enterococcus testing is considered the standard in the health industry. Older tests, which identify fecal coliform counts, have not proven as effective in preventing swimming-related illnesses.

SMC Health Department is the agency that tests local swimming beaches for bacteria and posts advisories once the MDE standard is exceeded. Maryland Department of the Environment is responsible for the safety of shellfish and other aquatic resources. Our inquiries to MDE on Wednesday morning, October 20—the first opportunity we had after learning of the spill Tuesday night—were met with a lack of concern. MDE did not issue any warnings saying that oysters in the area were not consumable due to the oyster sanctuary restriction and that advisories were already in place on all oyster floats under and adjacent to docks.

Initial notification of the spill came via an all-campus email from Associate Vice President of Planning and Facilities, Chip Jackson, at 18:03 hours Tuesday October 19. The leak occurred Sunday afternoon, October 17, and was repaired by 5 PM on Monday October 18. Signs notifying the public of the health advisory were placed at the college waterfront late on Tuesday afternoon. An estimated 45,000 to 50,000 gallons of raw sewerage entered into the marshes and waters of Fishermen's Creek.

The notice to college officials came more than 48 hours after the spill occurred. No official notice was ever made to waterfront property owners and to boaters in the vicinity. (SMRWA executive director Bob Lewis was vacationing in New Hampshire at the time.) SMRWA director and membership chair, Richard Holden, was notified Wednesday morning, and he proceeded to alert his neighbors in Horseshoe Bend.

Clearly, the notice of a threat to public safety should have been issued Sunday afternoon *when the leak occurred*. At that time, wind surfers on the river should have been warned and advised to return to shore and bathe. Signs should have been posted on Sunday at the college waterfront, along Rte. 5 leading into and out of the area, and on the water to alert boaters. A telephone call to all affected waterfront owners would also be appropriate in any instances of spills and public safety.

SMRWA will continue to advocate for better notice in the future and for redress for the MetCom-owned pipe system failure and for the lack of timely notice. We are still questioning whether the fish, crabs, and oysters are safe to eat. Generally, seafood should not be eaten for an additional two weeks after a test indicates safe levels of bacteria in the area waters. We advise everyone to cook seafood thoroughly until next week. Raw oysters pose an ongoing risk as background bacteria levels can affect one who consumes them. See MDE Advisory at [http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/Marylander/CitizensInfoCenterHome/Pages/citizensinfocenter/fishandshellfish/harvesting\\_notices/privatepier\\_shellfish.aspx](http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/Marylander/CitizensInfoCenterHome/Pages/citizensinfocenter/fishandshellfish/harvesting_notices/privatepier_shellfish.aspx)

\* \* \* \* \*

