



Wwals Watershed Coalition <wwalswatershed@gmail.com>

Very high E. coli counts on Withlacoochee River in Georgia with no Valdosta warning signs

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To: Wwals Watershed Coalition <wwalswatershed@gmail.com>

Cc: "Calhoun, Chris" <Chris.Calhoun@dph.ga.gov>, "Sheeley, Courtney" <Courtney.Sheeley@dph.ga.gov>

Mr. Quarterman,

I read your e-mail and will do my best to quickly answer your questions. As I told you on the telephone a couple of weeks ago, municipal sewage spills are monitored by Georgia Environmental Protection Division. Because of jurisdictional authority, Public Health in Georgia normally does not get involved with these types of spills unless some type of request is made by the divisional authority or in rare cases, Emergency Management Agency.

1. Was the Georgia Department of Health (GA DPH) or Lowndes Health informed about these Wednesday meetings in Madison and Valdosta?

Not to my knowledge

2. Will someone from GA DPH or Lowndes Health be at these meetings, to speak, or to answer questions?

Not to my knowledge

3. The Brooks County Administrator tells me she had some difficulty getting anybody at Lowndes Health to respond. Did she finally get through to you?

I was informed this morning that she left a message for Kyle Coppage at the Lowndes County H.D. and that he returned her call that day and left a message. I was informed she returned his call two days later and that they spoke. I do not know the extent of the conversation.

4. Did Valdosta notify DPH or Lowndes Health about this record-largest sewage spill since 2015?

To my knowledge, this office was not notified immediately. Lowndes H.D. may have been notified, which would have been the norm. District offices are usually not notified. These notifications are generally a FYI to local health departments because we do not have any jurisdiction in EPD regulated facilities. Courtney Sheeley, Director of Communications, was contacted by Valdosta Daily Times on December 9, 2019, for comment.

5. Did Valdosta keep DPH or Lowndes Health informed about water quality testing results after the spill was discovered?

Not to my knowledge

6. Human-specific genetic markers can be measured in water samples to detect human fecal pollution in water environments. Has any testing of this type been performed on Withlacoochee River samples? If so what are the results? If not why not?

We do not perform this type of testing. If testing occurred on the rivers, results have not been reported to this office to my knowledge. I do not know if they were reported to Lowndes County H.D.

7. Can DPH or Lowndes Health require Valdosta to inform neighboring counties, especially Brooks County if the spill affects the Withlacoochee River, and Echols County if the spill wwalswatershed@gmail.com PO Box 88, Hahira, GA 31632 Page 1 of 2 2019-12-09 850-290-2350 www.wwals.net affects the Alapahoochee River?

We do not have authority to require City of Valdosta to inform on this matter

8. As you can see in this composite spreadsheet, Sugar Creek for weeks, and the Withlacoochee River downstream of there for at least a week, was seriously contaminated with human waste bacteria. <http://wwals.net/?p=51176> How GA DPH or Lowndes Health help inform the public about such public health issues in our waterways?

To my knowledge, City of Valdosta or Georgia EPD did not ask for assistance in informing the public.

9. The Madison and Hamilton County, Florida, Health Departments twice issued a joint health advisory, on December 9, lifted December 16, and on December 20, lifted January 3, 2020. That first Florida advisory it turns out was unnecessary, because low flow kept the sewage mostly in Sugar Creek for a week. How can DPH or Lowndes Health keep Florida agencies and citizens better informed about Georgia sources of waterway contamination approaching Florida?

This would be City of Valdosta and/or Georgia EPD responsibility

10. The whole time from the apparent start date of the spill, December 3, 2019, until at least December 30, 2019, Valdosta's sewage was in waterways in Georgia. Why did DPH or Lowndes Health never issue a health advisory for Sugar Creek or the Withlacoochee River?

We were not asked to assist with an advisory. City of Valdosta and/or Georgia EPD responsibility

11. Hamilton County, Florida put health advisory warning signs at all its Withlacoochee River access points, and even upstream from the Withlacoochee Confluence on the Suwannee River. Florida Parks put a warning sign at Madison Blue Spring. Yet there were never any warning signs on the Withlacoochee River downstream from Sugar Creek. Valdosta says they put a sign at the Sugar Creek Confluence, there was one at the Gornto Road Bridge over Sugar Creek, and at Troupville Boat Ramp upstream on the Little River from

its Confluence with the Withlacoochee. But there were no warning signs at the Baytree Road Bridge over Sugar Creek nor at Bland Park between there and Gornto, and there were never any warning signs downstream from Sugar Creek on the Withlacoochee River. Why did DPH or Lowndes Health not set out any warning signs?

According to Georgia EPD this is a City of Valdosta responsibility

12. Why did DPH or Lowndes Health not require Valdosta to put out any warning signs?

Georgia DPH or Lowndes H.D. does not have jurisdiction in this matter, therefore we do not have the authority to require Valdosta to put out warning signs

13. Generally, how can DPH or Lowndes Health ensure the Georgia and Florida public and relevant agencies and other organizations are adequately informed and warned about public health issues in our waterways?

Monitoring of wastewater treatment facilities like the one in Valdosta fall under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, as does state waters. When you contacted me on December 23, I contacted Georgia EPD office in Albany, GA. I was referred to Marzieh Shavazaz 404-463-4933 Georgia EPD Atlanta. I left a message and an EPD representative (Ashlyn) returned my call. I told her that I had received a call of concern from the Suwannee Riverkeepers about the sewage spill that occurred on December 3 in the City of Valdosta. She said they were aware of the spill and working with the City of Valdosta. I asked about signage and she told me it was the city's responsibility for signage and that the City of Valdosta had been cooperating. I contacted Chris Calhoun, District Environmental Health Director, and Courtney Sheeley, District Communications Director, to see if anyone had contacted us for assistance. They were not aware of any requests. As I mentioned on the telephone that day, state waterways in Georgia fall under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division not Georgia Department of Public Health. I am not familiar with Florida's system or requirements. We have good relationship with the City of Valdosta and the EPD representative said they were cooperating.

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