

December 20, 2019

HEALTH OFFICIALS IN HAMILTON, MADISON COUNTIES ADVISE OF WASTEWATER CONTAMINATION IN THE WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER



Impacts from Valdosta, GA Wastewater Overflow

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Withlacoochee River in Madison and Hamilton Counties, FL – On December 9, 2019, the City of Valdosta, Georgia reported a spill of approximately 7.5 million gallons of untreated sewage that they believe began on December 3rd due to repair work on a major lift station. Sampling and laboratory results show the river water is impacted by the sewage spill and has recently moved into the Withlacoochee River at State Road 84 in Georgia. Due to the recent rains, the impact is predicted to be in Florida waterways within a day. In an abundance of caution, a public health advisory is being issued for the Withlacoochee River in Florida.

People in the area are urged to take precautions when in contact with the Withlacoochee River. The Florida Department of Health, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Suwannee River Water Management District are continuing to monitor the situation and will continue conducting water testing until the water is satisfactory for recreational contact. The health advisory will be in place until the water quality of the river has returned to normal.

Water contaminated with wastewater overflow presents several health risks to humans. Untreated human sewage with microbes could cause gastrointestinal issues and other serious health conditions. (David L. Heymann, MD. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*)

Anyone who comes into contact with the river water should wash thoroughly with soap and clean water, especially before eating or drinking. Children and older adults, as well as people with weakened immune systems, are particularly vulnerable to disease, so water contact should be avoided, and every precaution should be taken if in contact with the river water.

For information pertaining to the sewage spill and the city's remedial actions, contact the Valdosta Utilities Department Environmental Manager, Scott Fowler, at 229-259-3592 or sfowler@valdostacity.com.

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