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# Sonoma West Times Sewage spill reveals gap in pollution alert system

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SEBASTOPOL — Some Russian River beachgoers were surprised last week to learn there's no legal requirement to alert downstream recreational users when a pollution problem like a sewage spill has occurred upstream.

Unlike ocean beaches, which must be posted or even closed when ocean bacteria levels exceed certain health and safety thresh-

olds, there are no such mandatory requirements for freshwater recreational beaches. A broken Sebastopol city sewage line that sent raw sewage into the Laguna de Santa Rosa two weeks ago also had some people raising a stink about the absence of downstream health warnings.

State, county and city officials say they made a determination that none of the estimated 450,000 gallons of raw sewage that killed fish in the Laguna would reach the Russian River. They also posted Laguna areas downstream of the spill where human contact might occur, said J. J. Krug, director of the Environmental Health division of the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

"There was a posting and there was a determination made that there was no way it was going to get to the Russian River," said Krug. Immediately after the Sebastopol spill water quality officials weren't sure how far downstream the polluted Laguna water had flowed and some River users were alarmed that no official public announcement was made regarding recreational use downstream of the spill.

West County Supervisor Mike Reilly said River quality "was my first concern when I talked to the city folks," after the Aug. 6 spill. Officials assured him "the Laguna itself was moving."

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