

November 2, 2007

Mayor Mick Denham,  
City of Sanibel  
800 Dunlop Road  
Sanibel, Florida, 33957

Dear Mick:

Committee of the Islands (COTI) commends the City of Sanibel for its efforts to identify all possible sources for the bacterial contamination that recently affected Bowman's and Blind Pass Beaches. We urge the City to continue these efforts and to take additional steps, independently and in cooperation with the State Department of Environmental Protection and County Health Department, to further protect our waters from contamination.

Given that the City now operates a state of the art municipal sewer system, the Sanibel Bayous package plant, which has had recent technical and compliance problems, should, if possible be acquired by the City and decommissioned. The residences serviced by that plant could then be brought into the City system. This would help to reduce the likelihood of accidental discharges of effluent in the future.

Short of acquisition of the Sanibel Bayous plant, the City should assure itself that the permit to operate is kept current and request that copies of the monthly DEP inspection report be submitted to the City's public works director. In this way the City could address malfunctions with the DEP so that corrective steps would be taken promptly.

There are several steps which should be taken to assure that the effectiveness of water monitoring is maximized:

1. When the Lee County Health Department determines that pollution is present at one of our public beaches, more testing should be conducted for a few miles up and down the beach to determine the full extent of the area affected. In this way residents who frequent beaches closer to their homes than the public beaches could be afforded the same warnings and, therefore, the same level of protection as visitors. The fact that these pollution events are rare makes this additional testing reasonable and do-able.

2. Under the current program for evaluation of beach waters, bacterial studies include only fecal coliform and enterococci. While these are useful indicators of contamination, they reveal nothing about the possible presence of disease - causing organisms. When the beach waters test positive for harmful levels of fecal coliform or enterococci, additional studies should be performed to rule out the presence of pathogenic organisms which cause swimming related diseases such as cholera, typhoid, pseudomonas, legionellosis, bacterial gastroenteritis, acute viral infections and parasitic infections.

3. Finally, source tracking to identify origins of waterborne pathogens is possible and has been done elsewhere. We urge the City to work with the County Health Department or private laboratories to conduct source tracking during any future pollution events such the one we experienced this fall.

Sincerely,

Larry Schopp  
President

Cc. Members of City Council , City Manager Zimomra