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EPD: Wells not impacted by chemical release

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Trish DuBose, left, water quality coordinator for Satilla Riverkeeper, and Maggie VanCantforth, middle, coast to confluence watershed specialist for Altamaha Riverkeeper, test water at a chemical release site in Sterling on Tuesday while Rachael Thompson, right, executive director of Glynn Environmental Coalition, gathers another sample.

Michael Hall/The Brunswick News

Chris Road residents and others near a canal where an industrial chemical release killed hundreds of fish need not worry about their wells, but they should stay out of the water in the canal, according to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

The EPD said in a release Thursday that “public and private groundwater wells in the area are not expected to be affected by this release.”

“Residents are advised to remain out of the ditch along Chris Road and (Ga.) Highway 99 until the cleanup is complete,” the release said.

Sara Lips, EPD spokeswoman, told the Altamaha Riverkeeper organization in an email that there is no reason to believe any wells were impacted by the spill and that the EPD was coordinating with the local health department on the matter.

Anyone with concerns about their private well can contact the University of Georgia Extension Service’s Glynn County Extension office at 912-554-7577 or by email at uge3127@uga.edu.

Lips said the EPD is working with Sunbelt Forest Products on the cleanup efforts after a copper-based wood preserving chemical, copper carbonate, spilled from the Ga. 99 facility and into the stormwater canal adjacent to it. The spill was the result of a busted water pipe that carried the chemicals into the canal, which connects downstream to Dillard Creek and eventually flows into the Turtle River.

“Temporary containment systems have been installed to control potential contaminants that may remain,” the EPD’s release said. “Samples are being collected to determine if further work will be needed to clean up the ditch.”

Glynn Environmental Coalition, Altamaha Riverkeeper and Satilla Riverkeeper conducted their own water quality tests on Tuesday and collected a specimen of fish and a rooster that appeared to have died as a result of the release.

During visits to the site on Tuesday and Thursday by The News, other wildlife such as wood storks could be seen eating fish that died as a result of the spill.

The environmental groups reported on Thursday that it appeared the temporary containment system had been damaged in Wednesday’s storms and that the watered down, chocolate-milk colored contaminated water could be seen flowing downstream of the area contained by a dam.

Workers were at the containment site as of shortly after noon on Thursday.

A safety data sheet provided by the EPD on copper carbonate says the chemical can cause serious eye damage and is especially toxic to aquatic life.

The EPD said details of the spill like when it occurred and when it was first reported are part of an ongoing investigation and will become available when the investigation is complete.

Local environmental groups learned of the spill when a concerned citizen reported the contaminated water to them on Dec. 29.

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