



Chlorinated Water Discharge Kills 750 Fish In Baltimore County Stream: MDE Closes Case

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TIMONIUM - The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) reports that it remains uncertain about the source of an unlawful chlorine water discharge that resulted in the death of 750 fish in Roland Run, Baltimore County. Consequently, the department has now closed the case.

What Happened?

Over the Memorial Day weekend, MDE began receiving complaints from locals and the environmental group Blue Water Baltimore regarding many deceased minnows, chub, white suckers, and crayfish near the Essex Farm Road bridge in Riderwood.

Hundreds of dead fish lined the banks of the small stream, leading MDE to launch an investigation into the incident. An MDE inspector managed to trace the origin of the pollution to a stormwater conduit that opens into the stream below Jeffers and Alston roads.

According to the report, the inspector found that the water outlet smelled distinctly of chlorine, and all the algae nearby were totally bleached. While upstream, algae and fish appeared healthy; downstream was filled with dead fish and bleached algae almost half a mile to Thornton Ridge Road.

The investigation:

No liquid was observed emerging from the pipe during the initial May 27 investigation. However, upon revisiting the site two days later, the inspector was able to collect a water sample, which showed a low chlorine level.

The Valley Swim & Tennis Club, situated approximately 400 feet from the pipe, came under investigation. In an [interview with Baltimore Brew](#), Kelly Donovan, the club's owner, assured that they were not discharging any pool water and that they hadn't experienced any accidental spills.

"People who are fixing the water main for the county shot chlorinated water through the system. So they released the chlorine into their own water," Donovan told the Brew.

The MDE report noted that Baltimore County's Department of Public Works was contacted about any possible water main breaks in the area, but there were no reported or ongoing cases.

The federal ECHO (Enforcement and Compliance History Online) database shows that Valley Country Club's industrial surface water permit expired in 2017. Additionally, for the last 12 quarters, the club failed to submit mandatory compliance reports to MDE.

In his interview with the Brew, Donovan claimed to be unaware of such a permit, stating the club has a commercial swimming pool permit issued by Baltimore County. In 2014, the MDE issued a permit to the club, but since its expiration in 2017, there has yet to be an inspection by the agency.

Ultimately, MDE was unable to verify the source of the chlorine contamination and closed the investigation as a result.

The Baltimore County Council is aware of water quality issues in the area. In the recently released 2023 Basic Service Map, sewer lines near West Joppa Road and Falls Road have been designated as "an area of deficiency." This action could potentially put a halt to development in the area.

Advocacy group Green Towson Alliance, along with several retired engineers and planners, had voiced concerns to the Council. They argued that the old pipes could not cope with the volume of water during heavy rainfalls, causing overflows and sending high levels of sewage water into Lake Roland.

As per Maryland law, unauthorized pollutant discharge into state streams, which includes chlorine water lethal to marine life, can lead to a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 per day.