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[Environment](#) by [Mark Reutter](#) 6:18 am Jun 5, 2023

## **MDE comes up empty-handed in its investigation of the Roland Run fish kill**

The report notes that the fish kill was traced to a stormwater outfall located near a swim club. The pool owner denied discharging chlorinated water, and the source of the discharge remains unknown, MDE says.

Above: Bluntnose minnow (top) and mummichog found dead in Roland Run on May 27. (MDE)

The source of the illegal discharge of chlorinated water, which killed 750 fish in Roland Run in Baltimore County, “is unknown at this time,” says the Maryland Department of the Environment, which has closed out the case.

At the start of the Memorial Day weekend, MDE [found hundreds of dead](#) minnows, chub, white suckers and crayfish near the Essex Farm Road bridge in Riderwood after acting on complaints from local residents and the environmental watchdog group, Blue Water Baltimore.

The MDE inspector traced the source of the contamination to a stormwater pipe that empties into the stream below Jeffers and Alston roads.

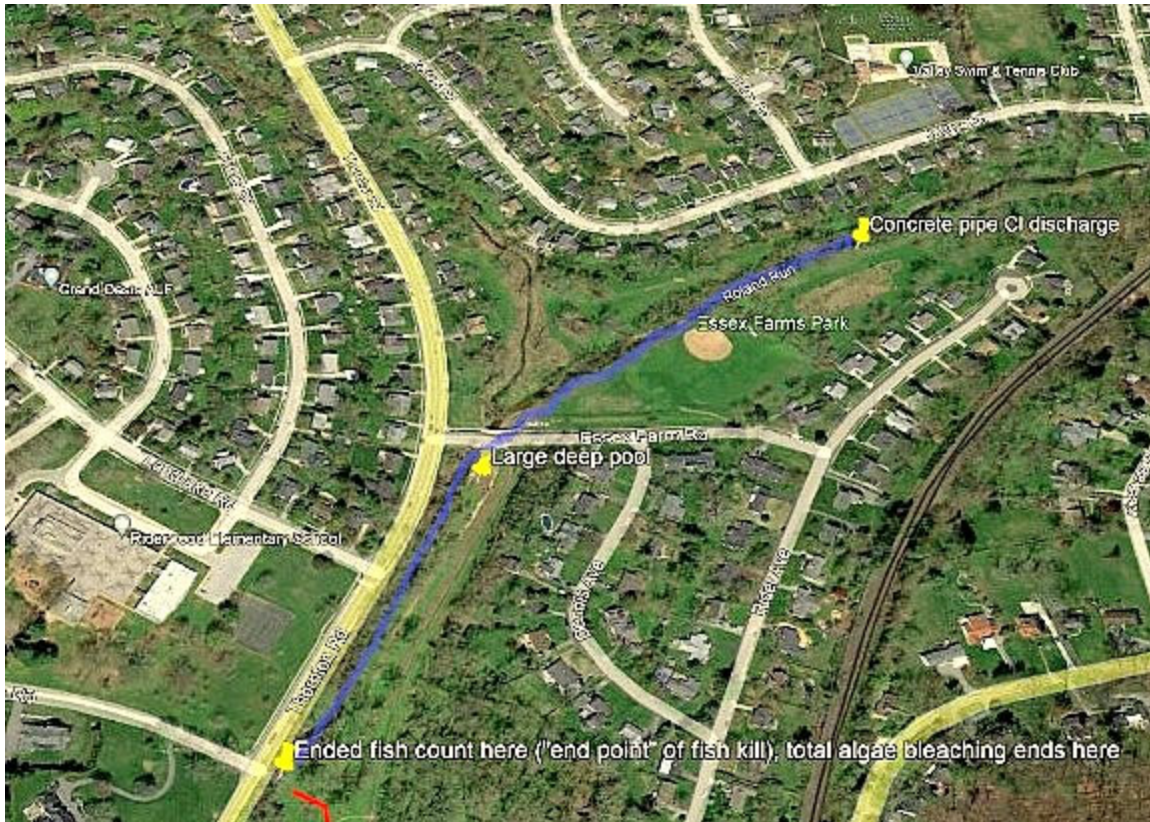
The outfall smelled of chlorine, and “all periphytic algae was completely bleached up to the pipe,” the May 27 inspection found.

Upstream from the pipe, the algae was “dark green and alive,” and fish were swimming. Downstream, dead fish and bleached algae were found to Thornton Ridge Road, a stretch of nearly half a mile.

No liquid was coming out of the pipe during the May 27 inspection. Returning two days later, the inspector collected a sample of water that was trickling out of the pipe, and it was found to contain a low level of chlorine.

Noting that the Valley Swim & Tennis Club is located about 400 feet from the pipe, an MDE compliance officer spoke to Kelly Donovan, owner of the club.

“I asked Mrs. Donovan whether they are/were discharging any chlorinated water from their pool. Mrs. Donovan stated that they had a contract with licensed company to handle the pool water, they are not discharging anything, and there were no accidental spills on site,” the report says.



The three yellow pins show where dead fish were found in Roland Run. Jeffers Road and the Valley Swim & Tennis Club are seen at the upper right. (MDA Compliance Report, the blue line showing the stream's path added by this website)

## Swim Club: No Knowledge

In an interview with *The Brew*, Donovan reiterated that the club had no knowledge of the incident and was “extremely alarmed” when it was contacted by MDE.

Donovan said she is was her understanding that the agency believed that a water main break had caused the contamination.

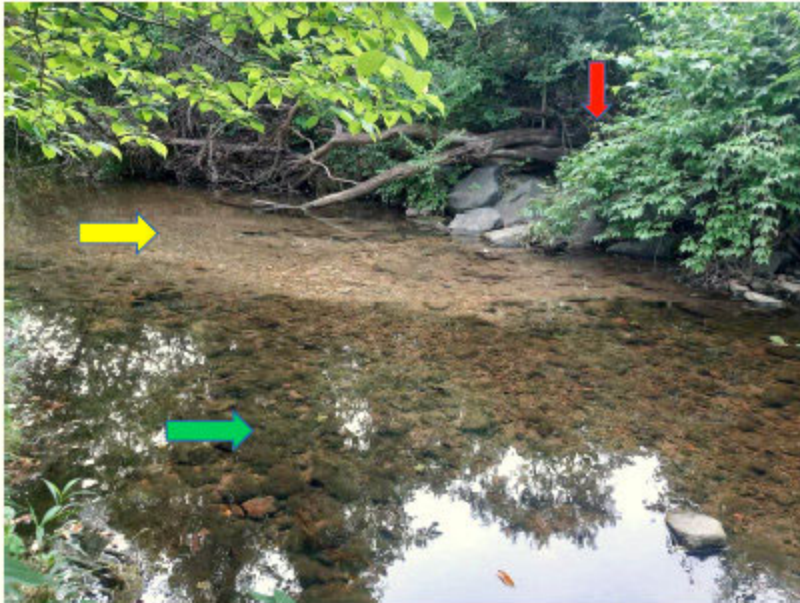
“People who are fixing the water main for the county shot chlorinated water through the system. So they released the chlorine into their own water,” Donovan said.

According to the closeout MDE report released on Friday, the compliance officer contacted Baltimore County DPW and “asked whether they have

information about any water main break in the area in recent days. I was told that no water main breaks were reported or are ongoing at the location.”

Residents living immediately around the pipe were also asked if they had observed “any work being conducted on the road or water discharge recently. One resident stated that early this morning [May 27] he heard a sound of gushing water, like during a storm, but when he looked outside there was no rain and no wind,” the report said.

The photo below shows the creek at the discharge pipe on May 27.



Bleaching of algae (yellow arrow) at the point of chlorinated water discharge, facing downstream/west. Compared to the dark algae, not impacted by bleaching (green arrow). The pipe outfall (red arrow)

## “Maybe someone’s house”

In a follow-up interview on Friday, Donovan said it was the MDE compliance officer who told her about the suspected water main break.

“I told her that I would be repeating those exact words to a reporter, and she said, ok. Maybe she shouldn’t have told me anything about any water main break. It just seems like nobody there knows what they’re doing.”

After she was read a portion of the report, Donovan said, “It really seems as if it could have been from someone’s house.”

She speculated that “someone dumped a bucket in the street that they shouldn’t have dumped.”



Valley Swim & Tennis Club features an Olympic-size swimming pool. ([valleyswimandtennisclub.com](http://valleyswimandtennisclub.com))

## Out of Compliance

The federal ECHO (Enforcement and Compliance History Online) database shows that an industrial surface water permit for Valley Country Club (listed at the same street address as Valley Swim & Tennis Club) [expired](#) on September 30, 2017.

For the last 12 quarters, the business has not submitted quarterly compliance reports to MDE, according to the database.

Donovan says the club has a commercial swimming pool permit by Baltimore County, but she was unaware of any industrial surface water permit.

“I have reached out to our contractor, American Pool, because there is obviously something we need that we don’t know about. As a business owner, I should be getting information from the state if I need a license or something, and I have not been receiving that information.”

MDE issued the permit to the club in 2014. Since its lapse in 2017, the agency appears not to have inspected the facility.

Under Maryland law, unauthorized discharge of pollutants into state streams, including chlorinated water toxic to aquatic life, is subject to a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 a day.

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