

NBC News NOW's *NBC News Daily with Morgan Radford and Vicky Nguyen*

01/28/26

1:22:51 p.m.

2 minutes and 50 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Tests Show High Levels of E. Coli in Potomac River After Sewage Spill]

MORGAN RADFORD: Dangerously high levels of e. coli showed up in some water tests in Washington, D.C. after a massive sewage spill in the Potomac River.

VICKY NGUYEN: That leak was pushing millions of gallons of sewage into the river each day. Mark Segraves from NBC Washington explains how local officials work to avoid a larger public health disaster.

MARK SEGRAVES: This break in a massive underground sewer line was spewing out raw sewage for almost a week. So far, about 300 million gallons of sewage has made its way into the Potomac River. But over the weekend, D.C. Water crews were successful in activating these bypass pumps, which are diverting the majority of that sewage now into the previously empty CNO Canal, where gravity takes the sewage down to these intakes, directing the sewage back into the system. The stream that was pushing millions of gallons of sewage each day into the river has now been greatly reduced. But Dean Naujoks, the Potomac Riverkeeper, worries about the damage already done.

DEAN NAUJOKS: I'm glad that D.C. Water has come up with a plan to try and divert the flow and minimize the impacts of the river, but again, is this going to continue to work, and how long will it take to actually fix this problem before no sewage is discharged into the Potomac River? And then they still have to clean this mess up?

SEGRAVES: Naujoks's group got their first test results back from water samples taken here at the spill site in Maryland and downriver in D.C. According to the Potomac Riverkeepers' test results, e-coli levels at the spill site in Maryland are nearly 12,000 times higher than the limit for safe human contact. Downriver in D.C. at Fletcher's boathouse, e. coli levels are 60 times higher than the safe limit.

NAUJOKS: We found alarmingly high numbers of sewage, e.coli in the river. We also tested in the river right below the discharge. Then we tested all the way down, about four miles down, and everywhere we tested downstream, we found very, very high levels of e.coli. But the bottom line is everything you find in normal sewage, whether it's bacteria, pathogens, parasite, is all in this discharge. And it's all in the river right now. And I'm really disappointed that our public health departments have not come out here and try to do any sampling that I'm aware of. Neither Maryland, Montgomery County or D.C. or Virginia. Nobody has stepped up to the plate.

SEGRAVES: A spokesperson for D.C. Water did not dispute the test results, but tells News4 they do anticipate water quality will improve once the overflow is completely contained. No

word on how long that or the final cleanup will take. And if you're wondering, yeah, it's not just the smell that is absolutely revolting down here, but if you open your mouth, you can't help but taste it. From the CNO Canal, Mark Seagraves, News4.