

*NBC Nightly News with Tom Llamas*

02/17/26

6:31:22 p.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: NBC News Reports; Potomac Sewage Disaster]

TOM LLAMAS: Potomac sewage disaster. Millions of gallons of waste spewing into the river. Now among the worst spills in U.S. history. How long will it take to clean up?

(...)

6:40:53 p.m.

1 minute and 43 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Potomac Sewage Spill Disaster]

LLAMAS: In Washington, it could be one of the largest environmental disasters ever in this country. A massive cleanup is underway after hundreds of millions of gallons of waste spilled into the Potomac. Tom Costello is on the scene.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Massive Sewage Spill into Potomac River]

TOM COSTELLO: The river George Washington called the nation's river is tonight off limits and contaminated after a 60-year-old sewage line in Maryland broke up last month, spewing more than 240,000 gallons of raw waste into the river. The same river that flows past the Kennedy Center and Lincoln Memorial and used by boaters, kayakers, high school and college rowing teams.

DEAN NAUJOKS: So, you can see the toilet paper, and the sewage up on the banks there.

COSTELLO: Riverkeeper Dean Naujoks says the stench and environmental damage are staggering with e.coli levels more than 10,000 times above EPA quality standards at the time of the spill. While slowly coming down, health experts warn no one should be boating, fishing, or even touching the Potomac. [TO LEWIS] Is drinking water at all affected here?

SHERRI LEWIS: No. From day one, drinking water has never been impacted by this.

COSTELLO: But massive boulders that collapsed into the six-foot-wide pipe are delaying the repairs. Meanwhile, President Trump has blamed Maryland's Democratic Governor Wes Moore for gross mismanagement while Moore fired back saying the pipe was federally built and regulated and the Trump EPA has been slow to respond. The fear now? The Potomac may not be safe for months. [TO NAUJOKS] You used to swim here?

NAUJOKS: I swam right here.

COSTELLO [TO NAUJOKS]: Would you swim in here again?

NAUJOKS: Not for a while.

COSTELLO: D.C. Water expects the repair to be done by mid-March, but overhauling the entire line could take at least nine months, Tom.

LLAMAS: Tom Costello for us. Tom, thank you.