

Sewer pipe failure fouls Laguna

• Defective pipe material is focus of lawsuit — 439,000 gallons spilled into the Laguna

by Corey Young
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SEBASTOPOL — The city's main sewage line ruptured late on Tuesday of last week, spilling hundreds of thousands of gallons of waste into the Laguna de Santa Rosa and sending several agencies scrambling to clean up the mess.

On Friday the city's public works department said it believed the spill was confined to the area near the broken pipe, buried about six feet deep just a few yards south of where Highway 12 crosses the Laguna.

However, about 439,000 gallons of sewage flowed into the Laguna over the course of about 19 hours, said Public Works Supervisor Rich Emig. The city believes the pipe broke on Tuesday night, Aug. 6.

In the early afternoon of the next day, the city shut down the sewage line, which transports about 700,000 gallons a day to the treatment plant on Llano Road. Trucks were brought in to haul the sewage to the treatment plant, and residents were asked to restrict use of toilets, showers and washing machines.

The city patched the pipe around 8 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 7.

John Short, senior engineer with the North Coast

Water Quality Control Board, said dozens of fish were killed as a result of the spill. Bacteria in the water used up oxygen, "so there's nothing left for the fish," he said.

Short said that it appeared that the spill posed no health and safety risk for downstream Russian River recreational users.

"We are pulling some samples," he said. "We don't know how far downstream this has reached."

Short said it is too early to determine whether fines or sanctions against the city are possible.

"The focus right now has to be making sure the leak has stopped and the water quality has improved," he said. Once that happens, the water quality board will sit down with city staff and discuss the circumstances of the spill.

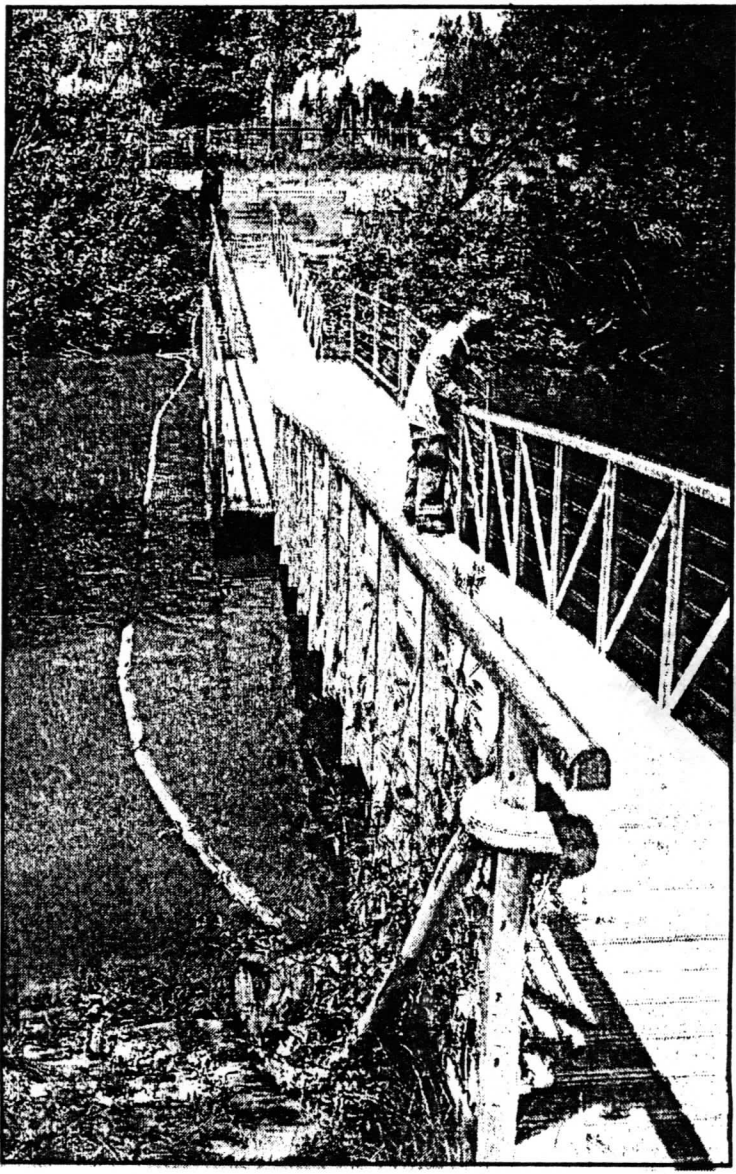
Short said most of the spill appears to have been contained "in the Laguna system."

A water sample taken from the Russian River at Steelhead Beach prior to the weekend "did not show high bacteria contamination," said Short. "Steelhead Beach showed everything within recommend guidelines" for recreational contact.

In contrast, samples taken after the spill in the area of the Laguna footbridge in Sebastopol "showed very high bacteria," said Short.

The Water Quality Control Board posts its River water sample results online at www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb1/sampling/sampling.html.

Sebastopol's Emig said



Corey Young

CLEANUP EFFORT — Sebastopol firefighters stretched booms across the Laguna de Santa Rosa last Wednesday to stop raw sewage from flowing downstream. Sewage entered the Laguna after the city's main pipe broke late Tuesday night.

after the spill was discovered the city pumped out more than six million gallons of contaminated water into a "safety pond" along the new Laguna loop trail. They used pumps to aerate the water

last week and earlier this week.

"The water quality is getting better. The odor is gone," he said. "We see fish swimming in there."

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