

City of W.P.
Lakes ~~General~~
Pollution

Pollution source puzzles officials

Winter Park speculates sewer contaminates 1 of 2 closed lakes

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

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WINTER PARK — Staff members say the city can do little to find the source of pollution that has forced the closing of lakes Baldwin and Virginia to swimmers.

Water-skiers still use the lakes and the city rents canoes at both, but signs have been posted for most of the summer to warn swimmers away.

"The county did tests on them and determined the bacteriological counts were too high," said public works director Jim Williams.

"We suspect in Lake Virginia it's coming from the storm sewer," he said. "At Lake Baldwin I don't know what the cause is because we don't have any city storm sewers directly dumping into it."

Bill Carrico, parks and recreation director, said the closings have complicated his department's scheduling of lifeguards.

"It's open, it's shut and, as far as the hiring and scheduling of lifeguards goes that's been turned upside down," Carrico said. "It's disruptive to scheduling and it means that lifeguards get less hours."

Carrico said Lake Virginia was open to swimmers for about a month when the swimming season began in May but has been closed since. Lake Baldwin has been open more often but has been closed for the past three weeks.

Williams said initial tests by the public works department's lakes division showed that the lakes are being polluted by animal wastes, not human wastes.

"We still haven't given up the idea that, in the case of Lake Virginia, there's a sewer connection somewhere along the line that we haven't found. It's

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also possible someone is dumping sewage in one of our manholes," Williams said.

The Orange County Health Department did its first tests at Lake Baldwin May 6-8. All was fine until a May 21 test showed high levels of coliform bacteria. The lake was closed until a June 25 test showed the bacteria level had gone down. The level rose again on July 9, said Bill Toth, county health education supervisor.

Toth said if a coliform level of 1,000 parts per 100 milliliters of water is indicated the lake is closed to swimmers.

"The [coliform] bacteria itself is common to the intestinal tract of all warm-blooded animals and common soil bacteria," Toth said. "The bacteria itself is not really that harmful, but we use it as an indication that if it's present there is strong contamination of other types."

Toth said testing for those other contaminants is lengthy and expensive so the level of coliform has become a widely used indicator.

"People swimming in lakes showing high levels of coliform are subject to sinus conditions, ear infections, gastro-intestinal upsets and, if they have open sores, they may be subject to infection that way," Toth said.