

SATURDAY, AUGUST 30, 1997

Burst pipe sends raw sewage onto Chesapeake lawns

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BY LEWIS KRAUSKOPF
STAFF WRITER

CHESAPEAKE — A corroded sewer line burst through a road next to Deep Creek Middle School on Friday morning, spewing foul-smelling water into driveways and front yards before flowing into nearby waterways.

About 180,000 gallons of raw sewage spilled into the Deep Creek tributary to the Elizabeth River, causing the Health Department to

discourage recreational use in nearby bodies of water.

The department closed a recreational facility off Interstate 64, where many people might otherwise have been swimming, boating and water skiing over the Labor Day weekend.

The locks along the Intracoastal Waterway will remain open to boaters, but swimming is discouraged, said Dr. Nancy M. Welch, city health director.

The locks will remain open so the

contaminated water can continue to flow and be diluted by mixing with clean water downstream, Welch said. Still, she recommended that boaters use the Great Bridge locks, if possible.

Health risks from ingesting the waste water include infection from E. coli, hepatitis and salmonella, Welch said.

Because the waste comes from human stools, the germs would not



Keith Fitzgerald of Hampton Roads Sanitation District probes for pipes under the sewage in the 500 block of Shell Road in Chesapeake's Deep Creek section.

MORT FRYMAN/The
Virginian-Pilot

Please see **Spill**, Page B5



Larry Barr, an employee of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District, talks on a telephone as sewage flows around him Friday in the 500 block of Shell Road in Chesapeake's Deep Creek section. The 180,000 gallons of sewage that spilled would fill about 7½ average residential swimming pools.

MORT FRYMAN
The Virginian-Pilot

Spill: Burst pipe sends raw sewage flowing

Continued from Page B1

threaten fish, Welch said. Pfiesteria piscicida — which is thought to have killed more than 2,000 fish in Virginia's side of the Pocomoke Sound this week — was not a concern, Welch said.

Because people cook fish before eating them — and thereby kill any bacteria present — Welch said she is not concerned about people eating fish caught in the polluted waters.

Welch was unsure how long the health risks would persist. The Health Department will revisit decisions to close the Deep Creek recreational facility after the Hampton Roads Sanitation District conducts tests on the water this weekend.

The pipe break, which left about a five-foot-wide hole in Shell Road, occurred in the sewer line force main pipe between 8 and 9 a.m. Friday. The black water flowed from the broken, 24-inch pipe out onto the street for about three hours, before HRSRD workers could divert the flow of sewage to other pipes.

"It was just like a flowing river. . . . But it wasn't water," said Beth Stanfield of the 500 block of Shell Road.

Stanfield was one of a few residents whose front yards were sullied by pools of sewage. Puddles of the pungent water still sat in residents' driveways around noon. No water seeped into residents' homes, however, said Kathleen S. Cosco, public information officer for the HRSRD.

residential sewerage use, Cosco said. A new pipe was expected to be in place Friday evening.

The sewer break was the second such break in South Hampton Roads within 24 hours. In Virginia Beach, a sewer line burst at Ferrell Parkway and Indian Lakes Boulevard around 8 p.m. Thursday, closing a lane, said Keith Benson, director of interceptors for HRSRD. The two breaks didn't seem to be linked, Cosco said.

The HRSRD is responsible for all sewer lines from Williamsburg to Virginia Beach, Cosco said.

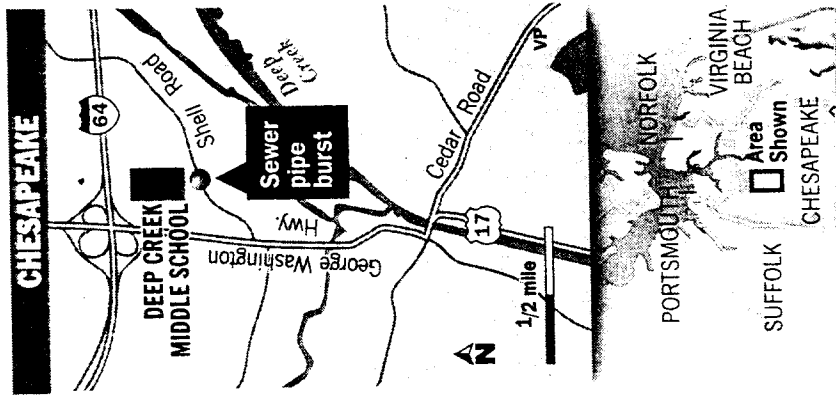
The break was the second in Deep Creek within the past year. In October, a burst pipe sent about 75,000 gallons of raw sewage into the Forest Cove neighborhood. Sewage spilled into homes, damaging walls, carpets and floors.

That break caused more residential damage because it occurred during a storm, Cosco said. The two Deep Creek breaks are unrelated, she said.

At midday Friday, Shell Road was caked with black sludge and flooded with waste water. The health problems on the road were seen as minimal, said Winfred Reese, an inspector with the Health Department.

The major "health risks would be walking around and playing around in it," Reese said.

Cleanup crews were to wash down and sprinkle the road with lime to rid the area of bacteria, dirty water and stench. Therefore, Reese didn't foresee problems for students starting classes Tuesday at



HRSRD workers and firemen walked around Shell Road in boots Friday, assessing the damage to the pipe. A backhoe scooped sludge and thick waste water from the hole.

The 180,000 gallons that spilled would fill about 7½ average residential swimming pools.

The corrosion in the pipe was caused by oxygen mixing with hydrogen sulfide that ate away at the pipe over time, Cosco said.

The burst pipe would not affect

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

- Try to avoid walking in yards that were contaminated with sewage.
- Do not walk barefoot.
- If you do walk in sewage, then clean your shoes with a bleach solution (Use just enough bleach in the water that you can smell it.)
- Try to avoid pets walking in contaminated areas. If they do, then hose them down before letting them in the house or playing with them.
- Hose the undercarriage of cars exposed to the raw sewage.
- Use good handwashing, and clean well under the nails.
- Infections transmitted by sewage would most likely be gastrointestinal and could cause diarrhea. Should you develop these symptoms, check with your doctor.

Source: The Chesapeake Health Department

nearby Deep Creek Middle School.

"We've seen a whole lot worse," Reese said.

The sanitation district intends to pay the cost of cleanup.

For Stanfield, a school bus driver, the spill meant a Labor Day weekend she wasn't looking forward to.

"I've got four days left till school, and this is how I'm gonna spend it — cleaning my yard up," she said.