

BEACH POLLUTION

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The county health departments survey the beaches weekly to find whether harmful bacteria have risen to levels that can cause swimmers digestive problems, rashes and other ailments.

The waters just off the Energy and Marine Center in Port Richey were found to be unhealthy 23 percent of the time they were tested.

Since 2003, coastal counties have been monitoring their beaches weekly. Before that, they monitored less frequently.

Bart Bibler, bureau chief of water programs at the state Department of Health, said officials post advisories quickly after finding unsafe bacterial levels.

Bibler and other state officials disagreed with Young's assertion that most advisories could be prevented if the infrastructure were improved and stormwater runoff was captured.

"We really don't know the root causes," said Bibler, who noted that the monitoring program is intended to protect swimmers and does not fund investigative efforts.



Tribune photo by COLIN HACKLEY

Pollution is not a natural occurrence and needs to be addressed, said Linda Young, Clean Water Network's southeast director.

Geof Mansfield, a senior analyst in the division of water resources at the state Department of Environmental Protection, said, "There are billions of gallons of water treated every day in this state and relative to that, there is an infinitesimally small amount that

overflows." "The idea that wastewater spills are a significant threat to surface and groundwater in this state are not accurate," he said.

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