



Heavy rains cause sewage overflow at Edgewater; swimming discouraged

Published: Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 10:26 AM Updated: Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 9:20 PM



Liz Navratil, The Plain Dealer



[View full size](#)

Joshua Gunter, Plain Dealer file

Officials are discouraging swimming at Edgewater Beach today because heavy rains caused sewer run-off.

Updated 8:52 p.m. CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Sewer district officials hope the water at Edgewater Park will test clean this morning, a day after they asked residents not to swim there because sewage had flowed into Lake

Erie.

A storm water pipe overflowed an estimated 85,000 gallons of untreated sewage and rainwater over a six minute period Monday night during heavy rains, said Jeannie Chapman, a spokeswoman for the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District.

The pipe, part of the city's century-old sewer system, is designed to overflow into Lake Erie so the sewage does not back up into the basements of West Side homes and the nearby Westerly sewage treatment plant, Chapman said. It overflows an average of once every two years, according to the district.

The pipe sits on sand at Edgewater Park and the water creates a crevasse. Some of the water flows into Lake Erie and some flows onto the shore at Edgewater, she said.

She did not know how much fecal matter or bacteria was in the water, because it normally takes about 24 hours to get tests back. The sewer district issued the advisory after making a prediction using a formula that accounts for rainfall, wave height and other factors.

Beach clean-up usually takes a day or two but depends largely on the weather, she said.

The National Weather Service predicted that small storms expected Tuesday night would be followed by dry weather today, with temperatures somewhere in the 80s.

Robert LaPlante, a meteorologist for the service, predicted a 20 percent chance of showers around Cleveland Thursday, with temperatures in the upper 80s or lower 90s.

Chapman said she thought the sewage overflowed at Edgewater Park because it experienced more rain than other areas.

The region received between 1/3 and 3/4 an inch of rain Monday night, according to the National Weather Service.

Many parts of the older system are designed to collect both sewage and rainwater. When the pipes get overloaded during rain storms, a flap opens and the water-sewage combination flows out.

There is no penalty for swimming at Edgewater Beach despite the advisory, but people who do so risk being exposed to E. coli and other bacteria, Chapman said.

Sewer district staff plans to continue testing the water twice a day until it is safe, when they will update signs asking people not to swim, Chapman said.

Updates can also be found on the sewer district's website, <http://www.neorsd.org>.

The sewer district has been spending hundreds of millions of dollars to correct the problem of sewage overflow. Sewage used to overflow 40 to 50 times a year in the mid-1970s at the beach at Edgewater Park, according to a news release from the sewer district.

© 2010 cleveland.com. All rights reserved.