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## Scientists say 'clean' rain runoff is polluting beach

### Officials say fix for storm sewer problem won't be quick or cheap

By MARIE ROHDE

[mrohde@journalsentinel.com](mailto:mrohde@journalsentinel.com)

The more than 9 inches of snow that blanketed Milwaukee recently was not enough to cover weeds growing on Bradford Beach along Lake Michigan. And scientists say those plants are a sign of pollution.

Researchers contend they are indicative of polluted runoff, carried to the beach from sewers designed to carry "clean" rainwater to the lake.

While sewage dumping after heavy storms contributes to beach pollution, storm sewers draining directly on the beach explains elevated bacteria levels after light rains, said Sandra McLellan, a water quality expert with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Great Lakes Water Institute.

"The storm sewer outfalls are the primary cause for the pollution we're seeing at Bradford Beach," said McLellan, who is conducting a federally funded study of the beach.

And because pollutants are crossing the beach, McLellan said, advising swimmers to avoid the water may not be enough to protect the public.

The storm sewers run from the bluffs across Lincoln Memorial Drive and end at the beach. Although officials are working on a solution, beach lovers shouldn't expect one by summer.

"It's a priority, but our resources are limited," said Greg High, an administrator with the county Department of Parks and Public Infrastructure. "We want to make sure that we have the most cost-effective solution."

That won't be until 2006 at the earliest, he said.

For decades, storm sewers have been deemed the solution to too much rain getting into sanitary sewers. But researchers have found at least the first flush of storm water to be highly polluted.

Rain washes the grime from the streets - everything from car exhaust residue to animal waste, fertilizers and litter - into the storm sewer. When the storm sewer dumps on the beach, that provides nutrients for

the weeds to grow in the otherwise hostile sand. The rain also carries E. coli, a bacterium found in human and animal waste, that officials use as the standard in determining whether a beach should be closed.

Eventually, the solutions for Bradford Beach will have to be considered for other parts of the metropolitan area, said Steve Jacquart, intergovernmental relations coordinator for the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

Milwaukee County and MMSD are trying to solve the Bradford problem, but the solution will be neither quick nor cheap, officials say.

Jacquart said the sewerage district has provided the county with \$25,000 for equipment and crews to groom the beach in summer, but that won't eliminate beach closings.

Sue Black, director of Milwaukee County Parks, said the county is working with the sewerage district to figure out how to fix the problem. "The lakefront is very high on my radar screen," Black said. "We need to find out what our options are."

Jacquart isn't pointing fingers at Milwaukee County for creating a problem. Although Lincoln Memorial Drive was rebuilt only a few years ago, "there was not a recognition of the problem" caused by the outfalls at that time, he said.

Storm sewers were supposed to solve pollution problems, not cause them.

The first sewers in Milwaukee - and much of the rest of the country - were designed to carry both rainwater and sewage. The old part of Shorewood and a large section of the city - from Capitol Drive south to Oklahoma Ave. and from the lakefront to roughly 42nd St. - still have a single sewer. The rest of the metropolitan area has one sewer to carry waste from homes and buildings and another to carry the rain because the rain was considered clean.

"What we're seeing at Bradford Beach is typical of what we see in waterways throughout the area," said McLellan, who said her data on Bradford Beach will be published in a research paper in spring. "The E. coli in all the rivers goes through the roof every time it rains."

"We've been putting together alternative solutions," said High, the county administrator.

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From the Jan. 14, 2005 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
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