

Potomac River Recreational Water Advisory

Alexandria Health Department
February 23, 2026



Water Advisory: Potomac River

BLUF – A recreational water advisory has been issued for the Potomac River by the Virginia Department of Health.

The situation is evolving.



What happened?

- **Jan 19:** sewer line in Montgomery County, MD, collapses
 - 200+ million gallons of wastewater spill into Potomac River.
- **Jan 24:** DC Water completes a bypass to reroute back into the sewer system.
- **Feb 7:** another spill occurred.
- **Now:** repairs, advisories, monitoring, planning of cleanup and remediation



How did our City get involved?

- **February 13:** Virginia issues “recreational water advisory”
 - AHD re-shared locally in Alexandria.
- AHD has been sharing updates with our City since then.



Potomac Recreational Water Advisory

Recreational Water Advisory

- Avoid water sports & high water-contact activities (swimming, wading, kayaking, etc.)

Drinking water is safe

- Fairfax Water's Potomac source is upstream of spill.

Work is Ongoing

- **DC Water:** "repairs could take 4-6 weeks"
- Advisory up until sustainable repairs are made.

Advisory Area



Start: American Legion Memorial Bridge (I-495)

End: Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge (Route 301).

Includes shellfish growing area closure (issued by Maryland DoE)

Who is involved? VA & Others

Virginia

- **VA Department of Health (AHD parent agency):** issued a recreational water advisory, monitoring situation
- **VA Department of Environmental Quality:** testing water, posting public results
- **VA Department of Wildlife Resources** and **VA Department of Conservation and Recreation** are sharing information

DC Water (utility company) and DC, Maryland, & federal agencies also coordinating.



Who is involved? ALX

- Alexandria Health Department
 - Sharing information
 - Looping in City agencies
 - Monitoring health data
- Other City Agencies involved
 - Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities
 - Transportation & Environmental Services
 - Office of Communications & Community Engagement



What AHD is Doing

- **Informing** – sharing the advisory locally
- **Coordinating local response**
 - Working with City to post signs, spread word
 - Sharing details with elected officials
- **Monitoring health** – tracking gastrointestinal illness.
- AHD is **not** testing the water.

What should residents do?

- Follow the advisory
- Spread the word.
- Stay tuned to AHD for updates

FAQs & More Information

Are people getting sick?

No.

- No sign of increase in gastrointestinal illness associated with E. coli
- AHD monitoring continuously

Alexandria water quality data?

- AHD does not have a role in testing the water.
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality began sampling water
 - Several testing sites along Alexandria's waterfront
- Results & Question Form:
 - www.deq.virginia.gov/news-info



Is AHD coordinating with the EPA?

- AHD is not coordinating with the EPA
- EPA is working with DC Water & health agencies on situation (according to DC DOEE)



How does a cleanup work?

- AHD does not usually do cleanups and can't speak to details there.
- DC Water developing cleanup & remediation plans
 - DOEE, EPA, MDE, and National Park Service partnering (according to DC DOEE)
 - Website: www.dewater.com



What will long-term pipe repairs look like?

- DC Water planning long-term repairs and actions
- Website: www.dewater.com.



What is Alexandria doing to address impact on Alexandria waterways?

- To now, AHD's focus has been health.
- AHD will help connect City agencies with regional partners for information on ongoing work.



Best places for more info:

- **Virginia Department of Health Sewage Spill website:**
www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/potomac-sewage-spill/
- **DC Water website:** www.dewater.com
- **Virginia DEQ (for Virginia test results):**
www.deq.virginia.gov/

