Harrisburg Water Monitoring Shows Unsafe Levels of Bacteria in 33% of Tests in Susquehanna River this Summer

New Report Reveals Pennsylvania's Backtracking on Commitments to Control Stormwater Pollution

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Note: *A press conference will be held beside the Susquehanna River at 11 am on August 17 in Riverfront Park at State and Front streets, with visuals of the State Capitol dome and river. A ZOOM call for reporters will also be held at 1 pm that date via this link.*

Harrisburg, Pa – Water quality monitoring by the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper this summer found unsafe *E. coli* bacteria levels along the Harrisburg waterfront on a third of the testing days, with worse fecal contamination downstream of the city's stormwater and sewage outfalls.

Meanwhile, a new report by the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP) released today reveals that Pennsylvania has gone backwards in its commitments to control stormwater pollution in the Susquehanna and downstream Chesapeake Bay.

Pennsylvania's 2019 Bay cleanup plan will allow almost 7 million pounds (or 47 percent) more nitrogen pollution – the Bay's biggest killer – from urban and suburban stormwater runoff in the state by the cleanup deadline of 2025, compared to the state's plan back in 2012, according to the report by the Environmental Integrity Project, "Stormwater Backup in the Chesapeake Region."

Maryland's most recent Bay cleanup plan (called its "Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan") will allow about 1.5 million pounds (or 17 percent more) more nitrogen from stormwater runoff into the estuary from the state by the cleanup deadline, compared to the state's 2012 plan, which used 2009 as a starting point.

“At a time of increased concerns about public health, Pennsylvania really needs to start getting serious about controlling its stormwater pollution, because our water monitoring shows it is creating a health hazard even down the street from the State Capitol Complex – which is a disgrace,” said Ted Evgeniadis, the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper. “Pennsylvania needs to invest more in not only Harrisburg’s water quality, but in clean water for everyone downstream.”

Abel Russ, Senior Attorney for the Environmental Integrity Project and co-author of the report, said: “It is inexcusable that Maryland and Pennsylvania are backtracking on their commitments to control urban stormwater pollution at a time when climate change and increasing rainfall are having such a huge impact on the Chesapeake Bay. These states must step up, start planning for the precipitation flooding we area already experiencing because of global warming, and invest in the kinds of stormwater control projects and greenspaces that will provide a range of benefits to both the Chesapeake Bay and urban communities.”

The Environmental Integrity Project report reveals that Pennsylvania’s most recent bay cleanup plan would do far less than promised by the state back in 2012 to control stormwater pollution, only replacing 202 acres of parking lots and other “impervious surfaces” with rain-absorbing greenspaces by 2025 instead of the 2,300 acres proposed earlier by the state. The state’s 2019 plan would create 203,265 acres of stormwater control ponds, wetlands and other projects by 2025, instead of the 1.5 million acres of stormwater control promised by the state back in 2012, according to the Environmental Integrity Project report.

In Harrisburg, the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper has been monitoring bacteria levels just downstream from the city’s combined stormwater and sewage outfalls as part of an effort to convince Pennsylvania to stop the state capital’s routine release of contaminated wastewater into the Bay’s biggest tributary every time it rains. Capital Region Water released 902 million gallons of stormwater mixed with sewage into the Bay’s biggest tributary in 2019, and 1.4 billion gallons in 2018.

Monitoring for *E coli* bacteria at three locations on Harrisburg’s riverfront – including just down from outfalls near the Governor’s Mansion and State Office Complex – between June 5 and July 31, 2020, exceeded standards for safe swimming or water contact recreation in 20 of 60 samples (33 percent), according to sampling by the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper analyzed by ALS Environmental of Middletown, Pa. The average E coli reading (610) was almost 2.5 times higher than safe levels (235 CFU/100 ml of water.)

At City Island Beach Park, 4 of 20 tests (or 20 percent) had levels of E. coli bacteria above state standards for swimming or water contact recreation. That was a slightly lower percentage than last summer, but the beach remains closed because of high bacteria levels. That means the population of Harrisburg, which is three quarters African American or Latino, can not swim at their only public beach.

Although Harrisburg Capital Region Water has claimed that the effluent from the city’s outfalls is unlikely to impact bacteria levels in the river, the Riverkeeper’s monitoring found that *E coli*

concentrations downstream from the city's outfalls, as measured at the Route 83 bridge in Harrisburg, averaged almost three times higher than they were upstream from the city, at the Susquehanna Boat Ramp across from Front Street Diner.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and EPA in 2015 signed a weak partial consent decree with Capital Region Water to address the problem of combined sewage and stormwater overflows into the Susquehanna River. But unlike the consent decrees for other cities, the Harrisburg agreement – which is currently being renegotiated into a final form by DEP, EPA and Capital Region Water -- does not require Harrisburg to ever stop piping human waste into the river, perform bacteria monitoring, or build underground tanks to hold overflow during storms.

The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper and Environmental Integrity Project are urging the state to require and help pay for more substantial pollution control projects in Harrisburg, including through grants from Pennsylvania, which owns many buildings and about 40 percent of the land in the state capital.

"Because Harrisburg is not a wealthy city, and Pennsylvania owns large parts of the state capital, the state government has an additional obligation to pay for solving this water pollution problem in its own back yard," said Evgeniadis.

Charts and a map showing the bacateria sampling results in 2020 and 2019 are below:

Summer 2020 Bacteria Monitoring in Susquehanna River in Harrisburg

Monitoring Site	Average count of *E. coli* in CFU/100 mL (compared to swimming standard of 235)	Number and % of *E. coli* samples above swimming standard	Average count of fecal coliform in CFU/100 mL	Number of fecal coliform samples above standard (400 CFU/100 mL)
Governor's Residence	810	9 of 20 (45%)	15,217	13 of 20 (65%)
End of State Street	621	7 of 20 (35%)	8,649	13 of 20 (65%)
City Island Beach	400	4 of 20 (20%)	3,913	8 of 20 (40%)
Average in Harrisburg	610	33%	9,260	57%

Sampling by Susquehanna Riverkeeper from June 5th to July 31st 2020; bacterial analysis by ALS Environmental of Middletown, Pa. Standard for swimming and water contact recreation for E. coli *is 235 colony forming units (CFU)/100 mL water. Numbers are expressed as most probable number of colony forming units. For fecal coliform, swimming standard is no more than 10 % of samples over 400 CFU/100 mL.*

Summer 2019 Bacteria Monitoring in Susquehanna River in Harrisburg

Sampling by Susquehanna Riverkeeper from June 13th to July 30th 2020. Standard for swimming and water contact

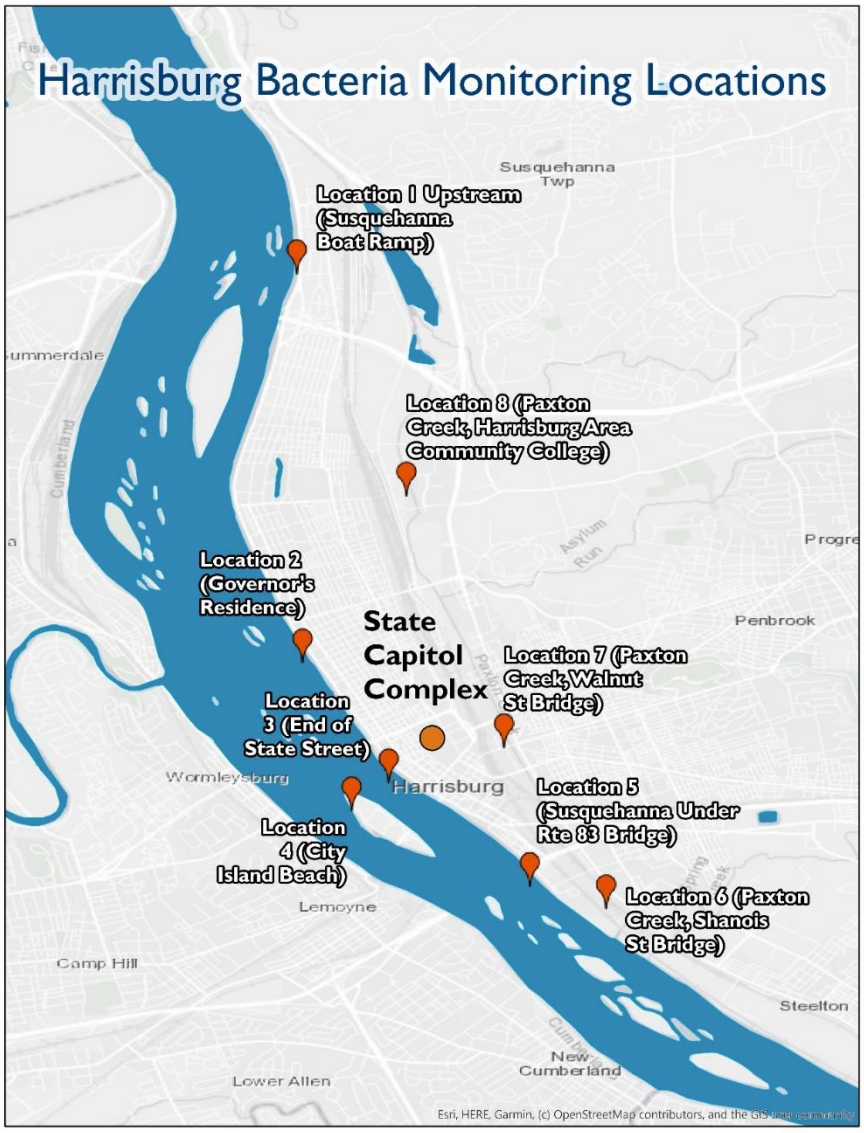
Monitoring Site	Average count of *E. coli* in CFU/100 mL (compared to swimming standard of 235)	Number and % of *E. coli* samples above swimming standard	Average count of fecal coliform in CFU/100 mL	Number of fecal coliform samples above standard (400 CFU/100 mL)
Governor's Residence	557	7 of 20 (35%)	2,305	(8 of 20) 40%
End of State Street	621	11 of 20 (55%)	2,664	(11 of 20) 55%
City Island Beach	801	11 of 20 (55%)	3,638	(11 of 20) 55%
Average in Harrisburg	659	48%	2,869	50%

recreation for E. coli *is 235 colony forming units (CFU)/100 mL water. Numbers are expressed as most probable number of colony forming units. For fecal coliform, swimming standard is no more than 10 % of samples over 400 CFU/100 mL.*

Results for All Locations of Bacteria Monitoring in Harrisburg, 2020

Monitoring Site	Location on Waterway	Average count of *E. coli* in CFU/100 mL (compared to swimming standard of 235)	Number and % of *E. coli* samples above swimming standard	Average count of fecal coliform in CFU/100 mL	Fecal coliform % of samples exceeding standard
1: Susquehanna Boat Ramp Across from Front St Diner	Upstream of Harrisburg	393	6 of 20 (30%)	3,043	45%
2: Governor's Residence	Riverfront Park	810	9 of 20 (45%)	15,217	65%
3: End of State Street	Riverfront Park	621	7 of 20 (35%)	8,649	65%
4: City Island Beach	City Island Park	400	4 of 20 (20%)	3,913	40%
5: Susquehanna Under Route 83 Bridge	Downstream	1,163	14 of 20 (70%)	5,410	75%
6: Paxton Creek, Shanois St Bridge	Paxton Creek	1,180	19 of 20 (95%)	20,864	90%
7: Paxton Creek, Walnut St Bridge	Paxton Creek	1,122	19 of 20 (95%)	13,353	90%
8: Paxton Creek, Harrisburg Area Community College	Paxton Creek	547	8 of 20 (40%)	6,041	60%

Sampling by Susquehanna Riverkeeper from June 5th to July 31st 2020; bacterial analysis by ALS Environmental of Middletown, Pa. Standard for swimming and water contact recreation for E. coli *is 235 colony forming units (CFU)/100 mL water. Numbers are expressed as most probable number of colony forming units. For fecal coliform, swimming standard is no more than 10 % of samples over 400 CFU/100 mL.*



The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper is fights to protect and clean up the Susquehanna River, the largest tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

The Environmental Integrity Project is an 18-year-old nonprofit organization, based in Washington, D.C., that is dedicated to strengthening public policy and enforcing environmental laws to protect public health.

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