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Improved Water Quality - the Illicit Discharge Elimination Program, Kristen O. Jurs

Abstract:

In 2002, the St. Clair County (SCC) Health Department and Drain Commissioner's Office initiated an Illicit Discharge Elimination Program that was very successful in reducing bacteria levels in waterways and at local beaches.

Since 2002, the SCC IDEP program has surveyed 3,087 miles, located 6,170 outfalls, performed extensive educational outreach, identified 585 illicit discharges, and identified several small communities in need of sanitary sewer systems. To date, 448 of the illicit discharges have been corrected, reducing the amount of sewage discharged in local waterways by 32 million gallons per year. Two of the small communities are also currently installing treatment systems to address their sewage problems.

When one compares statistics from the last five years of SCC's Beach Monitoring Program with the previous 5 years, E coli levels and beach closure statistics show marked improvements. From 1998- 2002, there were 62 beach closures and 300 days when the E coli limit was exceeded. From 2003 – 2007, there were 31 beach closures and 62 when the E coli limit was exceeded.

With the knowledge and expertise gained from this project, and the success of IDEP apparent, SCC expects to continue IDEP to further improve bacteria conditions of local waterways and beaches.