

## Venice forced to scale back stormwater treatment plan

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VENICE, Fla. - In the past few years, Venice has dealt with several beach advisories due to unwanted bacteria in the water. Now plans to fix the problem are being scaled back because estimates for the projects are skyrocketing.

Seven runoff outfalls line Venice Beach. The problem is, officials say the underground tanks, which hold runoff water during the dry season are breeding grounds for bacteria. City engineers say even with a scaled back project to fix it, they're hopeful they can still work on the problem.

Dolores Swanhart was relaxing by the clear blue gulf water Wednesday, when suddenly she saw a dark spot in the water. "I sat up; I thought it was maybe a school of fish or something. But that's not what it is."

It was coming from one of Venice's outfall pipes. "It smells like stinky stagnant water."

City officials say it's a result of relining some of their stormwater pipes -- the latest in their efforts to fix a recurring problem.

"The beaches are extremely important to us. It was the number one council priority," says Venice city engineer Kathleen Weeden.

A number of times in the past few years, county water quality tests have indicated high levels of bacteria typically found in animal waste. It resulted in multiple beach warnings. "With the drought conditions we have had, we felt there was some concern with rodents or some other type of wildlife getting into the storm water system to use it as a drinking source."

In the dry season, the water runoff from sprinklers and other sources can sit stagnant as the bacteria grows. After months of investigating, engineers with the city came up with a plan to treat the water before it hit the beach. It included a UV filtration system.

However, the estimated cost of the project has now nearly tripled. "Initially we had intended to do a larger scale project at Deer Town Gully and Flamingo Ditch. When the cost estimates rose from \$1.2 million for one outfall to \$3.6 million, the cost benefit ratio just wasn't there."

For now they will work to fix the problem by cleaning out ditches and swales that run towards the outfalls. "What we have decided to do as a benefit is take that funding and do restoration at all three outfalls. This fall we hope to have that underway," says Weeden.

She says cleaning up where the water sits should help as they wait for more funding and grants for a more long term solution. "While it is not what we intended to do, this is a great first step."

The city says some of that money was to bury some of the pipes deeper underground and pump the water farther offshore.