

## **Environmental Groups Start Water Testing In Montauk, Post Results Online**

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Two local groups announced on Friday a new joint effort to test bacteria levels in Montauk waters and post the results and a map of sampling locations online for free access by the public, with a goal of raising awareness and helping to improve the water quality.

Concerned Citizens of Montauk (CCOM), a nonprofit organization that seeks to preserve the hamlet's ecology, and the Eastern Long Island Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, a nonprofit that aims to protect the oceans and beaches, began testing in June at eight sites spread across the ocean beach at Ditch Plains and South Lake near the former public bathing beach in Lake Montauk.

Samples will be taken weekly and following big rainfalls, when runoff flushes pollutants into the waters. Using an Environmental Protection Agency-approved method, volunteers trained by Mara Dias, the water quality manager for Surfrider, will take water samples and test them for Enterococcus, a type of bacteria that lives in the digestive systems of warm-blooded animals.

"If you have it in your water, it indicates that there's some sort of fecal pollution, maybe some septic or sanitary waste," Ms. Dias explained, noting it could come from bird droppings or dog waste. "It's not good for people to swim in."

High levels of this bacteria in water could cause gastrointestinal illness, rashes, infections and cold-like symptoms in swimmers, she said.

The samples are tested at CCOM's new office in downtown Montauk and provide a measurement of bacteria in the water that can be compared to national water quality standards designed to protect public health.

South Lake's water quality has been called into question by the Suffolk County Health Department, but its warm, calm, shallow water still attracts families with young swimmers,

observed Ms. Dias, a former water quality specialist for the county.

Talk over the past several years about trying to reopen South Lake as an official swimming area helped spark this new effort, said Jeremy Samuelson, executive director of CCOM.

So far, some of the tests indicate high bacteria levels, but because testing just started, Ms. Dias said, she did not want to make rash judgments. "One test doesn't give the whole picture," she noted.

The new water testing lab joins 30 other labs operating under the auspices of Surfrider's Blue Water Task Force program, a volunteer-run, water testing, education and advocacy program.

Test results and locations in Montauk are available on the task force's website, at [www.surfrider.org/blue-water-task-force/chapter/37](http://www.surfrider.org/blue-water-task-force/chapter/37).