

LONG ISLANDSUFFOLK

Montauk pipe bacteria suspected from federal beach project

The Lowenstein Pipe deposits stormwater onto the beach at the end of Surfside Place in Montauk. Photo Credit: Newsday/Vera Chinese

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A Montauk stormwater drain pipe has spouted a cola-colored waterfall onto the ocean beach during heavy rain for the past three years. Now engineers working with East Hampton Town officials will study where the water is flowing from and the best way to treat it before it enters the ocean.



The town's water quality technical advisory committee recommended in December that an engineering firm study the drainage system's route to the pipe and determine the best way to treat the problem. Earlier this month, the town accepted a \$90,320 bid from VHB Engineering, Surveying, Landscape Architecture & Geology PC, which has an office in Hauppauge, to perform the work.

Stormwater is a source of bacteria and nitrogen loading in waterways, and affects water-quality issues. The drainage route is largely unknown, though it is suspected to connect to development built south of Montauk Highway decades ago.

"We're not sure what we are going to learn from this investigation of the pipe's origin," said Kim Shaw, East Hampton's environmental protection director.

Stormwater has always flowed through the area at the end of Lowenstein Court, but the pipe that can be seen jutting out past the dunes was extended 40 feet in 2016 to accommodate the controversial Army Corps of Engineers sandbag sea wall project. Previously, water drained through a culvert behind the dune and only a trickle could be seen, Shaw said.

"There's always been a drainage problem, but now it's very visible," Shaw said.

The outfall pipe is one of 30 sites throughout the town that is regularly tested for enterococcus bacteria. The tests are conducted by Concerned Citizens of Montauk, a nonprofit

community group, in partnership with the Eastern Long Island Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. Enterococcus is a coliform bacterium that indicates fecal pollution from either humans or animals.

An early June reading showed the pipe's enterococcus levels at 487 colony forming units per milliliter. The New York State standard for coastal bathing beaches is 104 such units per milliliter. The surrounding beach is usually unaffected, although parents should warn children not to play in the pipe's outflow, said Kate Rossi-Snook, environmental advocate with the Concerned Citizens of Montauk.

"For the most part it [the pipe's enterococcus level] is well into the thousands, literally off the charts," said Rossi-Snook, who performs the testing. "I always see little footprints around and we cannot risk having children getting sick from it."

In the short-term, the town will install filters coated to remove bacterial contamination.

The town board in April approved a \$28,000 contract with Farmingdale-based Fabco Industries Inc. to purchase Helix filters with a \$10,000 three-year maintenance agreement. It also approved a \$28,340 contract with Bistran Materials of East Hampton to install them.

The filters and the study will be funded through Community Preservation Fund money, which is financed through a 2 percent tax on real estate transfers in the East End towns. A voter-approved change to the law in 2017 allows the towns to use the money for water-quality measures, and East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc said the pipe project undoubtedly qualifies for those funds.

"This is another effort on our part to ensure the public health and environment are protected," he said.

LOWENSTEIN PIPE

- The pipe was extended 40 feet in 2016 and now juts past the dune and spouts stormwater on the Montauk ocean beach.
- Concerned Citizens of Montauk regularly tests the pipe and finds high levels of enterococcus bacteria.
- A \$90,000 East Hampton Town engineering study will explore the pipe internally through a camera and determine the best locations to treat stormwater before it flows to the ocean.



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Vera Chinese joined Newsday in 2017 and covers the towns of Southampton, East Hampton and Shelter Island. A Long Island native, she has reported on East End issues for 10 years.