

OUR TOWNS

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RIVERHEAD

Partially treated sewage out in river

Riverhead's sewage treatment plant discharged another round of partially treated wastewater into the Peconic River last week, following three similar incidents last month.

Last Wednesday, about 800,000 gallons of wastewater — roughly a day's worth of sewage processed by the plant — contained higher-than-permitted levels of fecal coliform bacteria, the Riverhead Sewer District reported to the Suffolk County Department of Health. Sewer District Superinten-

dent Michael Reichel said yesterday that engineers are trying to regrow beneficial bacteria that treats sewage at the plant after a mechanical failure caused some of the bacteria to die in late October.

On Nov. 5, 19 and 26, the plant discharged a combined 2.5 million gallons of partially treated wastewater into the river, prompting the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to issue a notice of violation.

The DEC said a similar incident occurred in August.

"We're still trying to balance the system," Reichel said yesterday. "The concentrations have certainly come down from what they were . . . We've been getting good results back, except for the one on the 17th."

Reichel said the latest discharge does not pose a threat to public health and was contained within an "exclusion zone" of Peconic Bay that is closed to shellfishing.

He said temperature fluctuations and rainfall have complicated efforts to revive and sustain beneficial bacteria at the plant. "We're using every resource we have to make the corrective actions," he said.

The Riverhead Sewer Dis-

trict's plant serves a large portion of downtown Riverhead, and discharges treated waste from an outfall pipe near the Route 105 bridge over the Peconic River.

— WILL JAMES