



Chlorine Kills City Fish

The City of Fairfax Fire Marshall shut down the Mosby Woods Condominium pool, Friday, June 22, because of improper handling of the chlorination system, said Gary Orndoff, the city's assistant fire marshal. The pool, however, is not managed by the residents, but by U.S. Aquatics, a national pool management company.

Two 50-gallon containers at the Mosby Woods pool failed, said Orndoff, but secondary containment systems captured the chlorine. The city then required that U.S. Aquatics pump the chlorine out of the containment systems, and it was during that process that the discharge into the creek occurred.

"Some of the chlorine in the vat was more or less dumped down a floor drain," said Mark Miller, of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's pollution response office in Woodbridge.

That's when two local residents walking near the North Fork of Accotink Creek, in Mosby Woods, noticed something wrong. The women, Donna Weed and Sue Frodigh, saw dead fish and crayfish and smelled chlorine. Some of the crayfish had crawled onto rocks to escape the toxic water, according to Duane Murphy, coordinator with the Friends of Accotink Creek organization. Frodigh and Weed moved the crayfish to the South Fork, about 100 feet away, Murphy said, via e-mail.

The department of environmental quality will be sending an "unpermitted discharge letter" to U.S. Aquatics, said Miller, which is essentially a warning not to let something like this happen again. The department is still investigating, and could also decide to impose a fine on the company.

Murphy is thankful the Friends of Accotink Creek could provide a helping hand. Frodigh and Weed, had found the contact information for the city and the department of environmental quality through the Friend's Web site, www.accotink.org.

"Residents can put pressure on community pools if they are aware that those pools can cause harm to the environment," said city resident Joanna Cornell, a watershed specialist with the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, in an e-mail to Murphy. "Residents with private pools don't always know that the storm drains are connected to streams directly. There is a need for education."

Miller said it's not unusual for the department of environmental quality to get calls regarding pool discharges during the spring and summer months.

THE CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

By Lauren Glendenning
July 3, 2007