High Arsenic Levels On Pine Island Ignored By DEP, Lee County
By JESSICA MESZAROS • MAY 8, 2017

Pine Island, Lee County, FL VIEW SLIDESHOW 1 of 6

Pine Island, Lee County, FL
WGCU

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 UPDATED: Wednesday, May 10, 2017 at 4:25 pm

Lee County is once again looking for the chemical arsenic on Pine Island. That's after documents surfaced from a few years ago showing arsenic levels hundreds and sometimes thousands of times higher than the federal government allows on private and public lands.

Experts say this could've potentially harmed island residents and wildlife within the surrounding estuaries. Arsenic is a naturally occurring metal, but state and federal health officials say if high levels are consumed, it can make people sick and cause cancer.

Public records show state environmental officials knew about the high arsenic levels but decided to stop testing for it in 2015.

It's a windy day in Saint James City, on the southern tip of Pine Island. Bill Deile breaks up pieces of bread and throws them into the brackish lake behind his house.

"I'm feeding the turtles," Deile said, laughingly.

He does this every day. Deile said he's seen a lot of different creatures in and around the water like blue crabs, sheep's head fish and alligators. There's also a mixed group of shorebirds across the lake. And Deile said he sometimes sees an eagle.

"It's very rural, very agricultural," Deile said about the Pine Island area. "People tend to do a lot of fishing and a lot of drinking. People are friendly. Everybody minds their own business."

Deile has lived here in Island Acres Estate about a year and a half. He only recently found out dangerously high levels of the chemical arsenic were recorded on land in his neighborhood dating back to at least 2011.

Even higher levels of arsenic were detected on county-owned conservation land a couple miles away at Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve.

"What it means? I'm not sure," said Deile.

WGCU Investigation, Local Expert: State DEP, Lee County Ignored Arsenic Reports
By MATTHEW F SMITH & JULIE GLENN • MAY 10, 2017
Gulf Coast Live on WGCU

High arsenic levels have been found at Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve in Lee County.
PHOTO: JESSICA MESZAROS, WGCU

Listen Listening...52:35 Lee County records showing dangerously high levels of arsenic on Pine Island were ignored by county and state environmental officials, an investigation by a WGCU reporter found. The levels were several times the federal limit for environmental safety.

Reporter Jessica Meszaros probed public records and interviewed experts to confirm Lee County's own measurements for arsenic on Pine Island, at the Island Acres Estates community and at the county-owned Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve, showed dangerously high levels of arsenic dating back to at least 2011.
Local hydrogeologist Greg Rawl, a member of Lee County's Conservation 20/20 committee, also joins the program to explain how he helped bring the information about arsenic levels to light.

Also on the program are formal responses from Lee County and Florida's Department of Environmental Protection to Mesazros' investigation.

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