

The Herald News

RI Department of Environmental Management closes shellfish beds after Sunday storm

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By: Michael Holtzman

FALL RIVER — Two days after officials reopened areas of Mount Hope Bay and the Kickemuit River for shellfish harvesting, they were closed again Monday after Sunday's rainstorm.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management will keep the shellfish beds closed until sunrise on Aug. 15 because protocol mandates closure for a week after a rainstorm of more than a half-inch, said Terrance Sullivan, city administrator of community utilities.

He noted that this state uses .75 inches as its barometer, and will close its shellfish beds for five days, until Saturday.

"That's automatic, based on the amount of rain," Sullivan said of RIDEM and the Massachusetts Department of Marine Fisheries.

He said the city's sewer treatment plant recorded 1.37 inches of rain Sunday.

Officials in both states ordered shellfish beds closed Wednesday after a power and generator failure caused an estimated 625,000 gallons of untreated wastewater to back up into the Taunton River at the City Pier.

They reopened the beds three days later after bacteria levels quickly returned to normal.

Officials believe a lightning strike caused a power outage at the Central Street pumping station, and the untreated wastewater backed up to its lowest point, Sullivan said.

Mount Hope Bay's shellfish beds are conditionally open because officials are concerned about the effect heavy rains can cause from combined sewer overflow systems and separate stormwater systems, said Sullivan, adding he was not speaking for state officials.

In this area, Providence, Taunton and Fall River have CSO systems, and Newport, R.I., does, while most communities have separate storm drain systems, he said.

Sullivan said the more Fall River and other CSO project cities increase their pumping capacities into treatment plants, the less storm overflow of untreated sewage there will likely be after a heavy rainstorm or flood.

The Central Street pumping station is undergoing a \$3 million rehabilitation that will increase pumping capacity from 9 million gallons to 12 million gallons of water a day, he said. On a typical day, it pumps about 4 million gallons of wastewater south to the treatment plant.