

FYI

Nearly 1,000 gallons of sewage spills into estuary near Jack London Square

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As utility district workers performed a test of the San Antonio Creek Wet Weather Treatment Facility near Jack London Aquatic Center Wednesday morning, a pump malfunction released sewage into the nearby estuary for about five minutes, officials said.

It's unclear at this point whether the accident was the result of mechanical or human error, East Bay Municipal Utility District spokesman Charles Hardy said.

District workers immediately put up signs warning kayakers and others to avoid the water, and analysts took samples of the water to test for bacteria. Those tests take 24 hours to produce results, and the water will be closed off to the public until the tests come back negative, Hardy said.

Hardy downplayed the severity of the spill, saying it was less than 1,000 gallons - potentially much less, though the exact amount hasn't been determined - an amount that doesn't even require regulatory bodies to get involved in a spill.

"We've had, unfortunately, way, way bigger spills than this, and sometimes even then regulators haven't needed to get involved. But we err on the side of notification and decided to release this anyway. You want to be safe, even with a small spill," Hardy said.

The treatment facility, dormant during dry months, was being given a test run in advance of what Hardy said he hopes will be an active rainy season.

If the first round of testing comes back indicating dangerous levels of bacteria, the district will take additional samples for testing every 12 hours until they come back clean, Hardy said. The results of the testing

will be regularly posted at the district's Web site, www.ebmud.com. For information on potential health effects and precautions, call the Alameda County Environmental Health Department at 510-567-6700.