

SEPA say pollution on Portobello Beach was not sewage

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) report that they have been unable to identify what caused the high bacteria reading in bathing water at Portobello at the beginning of the month.

This led to immediate closure of Portobello Beach – although only for a short time before a safe notice was later issued on 10 July.

At Portobello, long-term sampling and microbial source tracking (MST) analysis showed that the three main sources of pollution tend to be human, dog and gull. SEPA officers checked Scottish Water assets in the area, as well as other potential sources, but no signs of pollution were detected. If the high result had been caused by sewage a clear MST indication of human would be expected.

Vicki White, SEPA Senior Manager in Environmental Performance, said: “The fact that a follow-up sample taken on Thursday 11th July showed water quality was already back to normal indicates this was a short-lived event that had no lasting impact.

“Microbial source tracking can be very helpful in identifying a source, but in this case our analysis of this one sample has not been able to identify one. However, these results –

combined with the fact our officers found no issues when we checked Scottish Water assets in the area – does indicate that this was not a sewage related incident.

“While this single result cannot give us a definite answer, it is a good reminder to clear up litter, as food sources can cause gulls to gather in large numbers. Picking up after your dog is another simple things people can do to help protect water quality – and make a beach visit more pleasant for other visitors.

“Water sampling will be ongoing throughout the bathing season as part of routine testing, and we will continue to investigate any high bacterial results and take actions to tackle any pollution sources identified.”

Chris Murray, MP for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh, said: “The state of the waters around Portobello and Musselburgh is concerning. Long term sampling suggests human waste is getting into the water, particularly after it rains – which isn’t exactly infrequently in Scotland. The Scottish Government needs to step up. The UK Labour Government has ideas about how to solve this in other parts of the UK – I’m willing to work with SNP ministers to share ideas if they’re willing to work with me.”



Portobello Beach where swimming is popular. © 2024 Martin McAdam