

Spring Break Volunteers Help Water Quality Study

Two Tallahassee oceanography grad students and an Environmental Policy instructor chose a different way to spend their Spring Break this week. They came to Key West as volunteers to take algae samples for a project sponsored by the Stop Shallow Sewage Wells in the Florida Keys Campaign.



Seaweed samples from the marine lagoon adjacent to shallow sewage wells and landfill on Cudjoe Key

Anne Michelle Harvey has a masters degree in Aquatic Environmental Sciences and also a law degree. Alexandra Harper is working on her Ph.D. in Marine Chemistry at Florida State University and Erin Canter, a microbiology lab technician in the FSU School of Oceanography, is about to return to school to get her masters degree in Ecology. The three young women volunteered their spring break time when they heard about the plans to start using shallow sewage well injection at Cudjoe Regional, planned to open next month.

“We’re doing a baseline study of the extent of the existing water quality impairment in the waters around Cudjoe’s shallow wells,” stated Harvey. “What we saw from our kayaks makes it pretty clear that something has already fouled the waters off Cudjoe, probably the former landfill. Using shallow wells for sewage is going to make it worse. And it’s against the law, too.”

The three volunteers were guided in kayak and canoe by Middle Torch Key resident Mike Tinnell, who is active in the Stop Shallow Sewage Wells in the Florida Keys Campaign which is being organized by his wife, Jerry Tinnell, and Key West resident Captain Camille Blatz.



Alexandra Harper, working on her Ph.D. in Marine Chemistry at FSU, collects seaweed samples.

“We need a deep well for Cudjoe Regional’s sewage effluent, like they have in Key West and Key Largo. Our waters need to be protected, too,” states Jerry Tinnell.

Blatz later hosted the women on a paddleboard excursion - for fun - after long days of collecting algae samples, preparing samples for drying, followed by grinding and shipment to a laboratory for analysis.

“These gals were great to spend their spring break helping us fight shallow sewage wells,” said Blatz. “And they’ve said they’ll come back to help some more.”

Dr. Brian Lapointe, Research Professor at Florida Atlantic University -Harbor Branch, and longtime Big Pine Key resident who’s been studying the effects of sewage effluent on local waters for over thirty years, organized and supervised the algae sampling research.

The local environmental group, **Stop Shallow Sewage Wells in the Florida Keys**, is holding a benefit to help stop the shallow sewage wells on Cudjoe Key. They plan a fun event with live music, silent auction, raffles, prizes, great food, drinks, and friends. The benefit will be Sunday, March 22 from 3-6 at the Sugarloaf Lodge Tikki Bar, Mile Marker 17. Live music by Larry Smith and Friends, Silent Auction, Great food, Raffles and 50-50. Local residents and businesses have donated generously.

\$10 buys you entrance and a chance at some great give-aways. You can buy tickets on line or at the Benefit for food, drinks, raffles and the knowledge that you’ve helped an important local cause.

Details and tickets at www.stopshallowsewagewellsinthefloridakeys.com.