

# Piney Point stormwater release into Tampa Bay a concern

Advocates worry about effect of 4.5M gallons

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As construction to close the first of four Piney Point phosphogypsum stacks is set to begin next month, officials must first remove 4.5 million gallons of rainwater accumulated on the work site during the year's rainy season and dispose of it directly in Tampa Bay.

The release has raised the concern of environmental advocates who have called for full closure of the site for years, only to see those fears realized in two major disasters in the past decade. Once in 2011 and again last year.

They are concerned the state is not being entirely transparent with the contents of the water, and they worry about the effect the water could have on Tampa Bay — which saw significant strain from the breach at the former fertilizer plant last year and was ravaged by red tide months later.

Officials said in this instance the unease is misplaced.

"I understand why people are getting jumpy about this," Tampa-based Attorney Herb Donica said. "Everything we do has a concern of some type attached to it."

He said the stormwater is not contaminated, and the release is simply the next step in the arduous process of permanently shuttering the former Piney Point fertilizer plant.

## **Full closure of Piney Point fertilizer plant set to begin**

The former Piney Point fertilizer plant has not operated since 2001, but a complicated set of bankruptcies, purchases and business transactions have delayed the full closure of the site despite significant progress by the state to close the facility in the early 2000s.

Two catastrophic failures at one of the gypstacks at Piney Point, specifically known as New Gypsum Stack South, have since tarnished the quality of abundant Tampa Bay waters and put north Manatee County

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homeowners who live nearby at risk.

Last year, a breach at the NGS-South gypstack forced officials to release about 215 million gallons into Tampa Bay through Port Manatee. In 2011,