

# Fla. utility fined \$1.75 million for Clean Water Act violation

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Nov 28th, 2000

Nov. 23, 2000 (Sarasota Herald-Tribune)—A federal judge in Tampa ordered longtime Sarasota developer Paul L. Paver and his utility company to pay \$1.75 million Monday for violating the Clean Water Act.

The fine is the highest imposed under the Clean Water Act in Florida's middle U.S. Court district, which stretches from Southwest Florida to Jacksonville.

Under the sentence by Judge Steven D. Merryday, Sarasota County will receive \$400,000 of the fine. The federal government will get \$520,000, a court trust fund for environmental restoration \$520,500 and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection \$309,000.

The fine was the result of Paver and his company, Southbay Utilities Inc., agreeing last spring to plead guilty to illegally dumping sewage in the Sarasota Bay ecosystem. Merryday did not sentence Paver to prison, although the plea agreement allowed for a term of up to one year.

Sarasota County officials discovered in 1998 that Southbay was surreptitiously using the county's storm-water drainage system to dispose of its waste water.

Using pipes to bypass a drain field designed to cleanse the treated sewage, the utility sent the waste directly into Dryman Bay in Osprey, and from there into Sarasota Bay.

Sarasota County officials estimate that the system dumped 1.5 tons of nitrogen into the bay annually, perhaps dating back as far as 1976. Excess nitrogen spawns algae blooms that deplete oxygen needed by fish and block sunlight essential for sea grass, a key source of food and shelter for marine life.

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