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Request for Coverage

Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance Files Complaint with TCEQ About Sewage Infrastructure Installed in Ridge at Lookout Canyon Cave

The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (GEAA) on Tuesday, March 14, 2013 submitted a [formal complaint](#) to the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality concerning the intersection of a cave during trenching for sewer lines as part of the Ridge at Lookout Canyon Phase II PUD development. A concerned citizen reported the location and extent of the cave to the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance. [KENS 5 TV News on March 5](#), 2013 reported this cave discovery as well.

Photos taken inside the cave (included in [the complaint](#)) show that the contractors intersected and breached the integrity of the cave on two separate incidents. Experts agree that an unsupported pipe joint, clearly visible in the provided photographs, will ultimately fail and release raw sewage into the cave. Detecting such a failure prior to contaminating the aquifer is extremely difficult. A raw sewage contamination of the Edwards Aquifer could result in an extreme threat to public health and potential massive outbreak of coli form bacterial disease.

Among other remedies, GEAA requested stopping all development construction activities until mapping this and other caves with in this development by geologists experienced with cave mapping and surveying techniques to determine the vertical and horizontal extent of this and other caves, as well as any important geological features.

Because the Edwards Aquifer does not filter liquids entering the Aquifer through the Recharge Zone, GEAA is greatly concerned about the casual installation of sewage infrastructure in this region. The first publicly reported outbreak of cryptosporidiosis, a deadly bacterial disease caused when sewage contaminates water supplies, occurred in a neighborhood over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone in San Antonio in 1984. The Edwards Aquifer Authority staff recently reported extremely elevated levels of fecal coli form bacteria in water wells as far as four miles away from the site of a spill that occurred on the Recharge Zone on October 15, 2012.

A study of sewage infrastructure conducted by GEAA found that between 2008 and 2012 eighty three sewage spills totaling 809,000 gallons (or 2.5 acre feet) of raw sewage occurred on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, most of this in the San Antonio area. The agencies tasked with oversight of water quality of the Edward Aquifer in San Antonio, (TCEQ, City of San Antonio, San Antonio Water Systems (SAWS) rely on the use of storm water management as the chief strategy for protecting water quality of the Edwards Aquifer. Measures to address the quality of storm water infiltrating the Edwards, however, provide no protection from the introduction of pollution from human sewage, which becomes particularly problematic with increased high density residential development of the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

An [aerial view](#) of the development site shows that the Ridge at Lookout Canyon has been clear cut. GEAA and others wonder how this was allowed to occur as regards the City of San Antonio's Tree Preservation Ordinance. GEAA is urging citizens to contact their City Council Representatives to ask them how and why this project was approved by the City.