

**JOINT PRESS RELEASE ON PINEY POINT
SUNCOAST AND TAMPA BAY WATERKEEPER**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE APRIL 7, 2021

On April 5th at 8PM an emergency meeting of the Suncoast Waterkeeper and Tampa Bay Waterkeeper boards was held to discuss the Piney Point/HRK emergency discharge into the waters of the Tampa Bay Estuary. We are providing a joint statement on the call for action on phosphogypsum stacks endangering the coastal habitats in Florida.

Joint Statement

The current failure at the Piney Point facility owned by HRK was preventable. FDEP knew of the failures of the liner not only at Piney Point but at other phosphogypsum stacks.

- The current status of the site (before the failure that caused the uncontrolled release) would have only allowed for 9.7 inches of rainfall before a breach. FDEP had authorized and coordinated the removal of over 2.35 billion gallons of water from the stacks before 2007, so they had the resources and historical knowledge and experience to remove mass amounts of water.
- FDEP from 2007 to present allowed water levels to increase from a near empty cell (with 1.3 billion gallons of lined storage available in closed reservoirs) to over 700 million gallons of water and dredged material. FDEP failed to provide the resources needed to remove the water from the stacks at the site and knew as early as 2013 about the need to remove water from the stacks.
- The current discharge of water far exceeding water quality standards for the Tampa Bay Estuary is delivering excess nitrogen and phosphorus to Bay waters. Both nutrients are known to fuel harmful algae blooms such as red tides. At the current rate of wastewater discharge nearly 500 tons of nitrogen are on track to be released in the course of about a week. This is equivalent to

approximately 100,000 bags of fertilizer, though levels of Nitrogen may vary throughout the water column in the stack and these numbers are an estimate, based on recent samples.

- The wastewater in the phosphogypsum stack has approximately ten times the nitrogen of raw sewage (latest readings show 230 mg per liter). The release of 480 million gallons of this wastewater does the damage of or is equivalent to approximately 28 years of population growth in the Tampa Bay Estuary, in the span of about a week. This violates the goals established to protect the public resources used for recreational and commercial activities.

Our community and environmental organizations need assurances by the State of Florida, our Governor, and the Secretary of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Senate and the House that this failure will be handled promptly with the utmost caution and assurances that future failures will be averted by enlightened leadership

This disaster was preventable. Permit conditions were ignored, water accumulation was not addressed when state funds were available to remedy the conditions.

As Waterkeepers we work hard to ensure our community rights are protected for clean waters, for fishable waters, for boatable waters and also drinkable waters. We have been greatly disappointed that the rights of the people of Florida have been jeopardized by the failure of our State.

We demand the following from the Governor and Legislature

1. Hold all responsible parties accountable.
2. Establish a statewide commission for phosphogypsum stack operations and closure. The Commission should be composed of Waterkeepers, environmental advocates, state, federal, and other stakeholders.

3. The State must totally fund the closure of all Piney Point stacks including removing the existing water and capping the site to prevent any water containment on site.
4. The State must process the seepage water to prevent degradation to the environment.
5. The State of Florida must provide enhanced water monitoring for five years and establish a public website with real time, historical data with links to all permit data related to the Piney point/HRK site (Not Oculus).
6. The State of Florida must test fish within the Tampa and Sarasota Bay Estuary for heavy metals and other parameters for two years. [Reference to previous study 1999.](#)
7. The State of Florida must develop a management plan to prevent stack failures for all phosphogypsum stacks within the State of Florida.
8. The State of Florida must enact a moratorium on any processing of phosphate ore for six months to insure bonds can provide financial resources to responsibly close the stacks.
9. The State of Florida must maintain the closure for snook and redfish for at least two years within the Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay estuaries.

Respectfully Submitted
The Suncoast Waterkeeper Board
The Tampa Bay Waterkeeper Board

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