

Our Backyard

Daphne Lewis
Photo Editor

"The solution to pollution is dilution" was a slogan proudly heralded in a past presidential administration many years ago. Thank god we know better than that now.

Or do we?

Over Christmas break, I visited the sewage treatment facility in my hometown, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

I was greeted by a country-boy operator and the reek of raw sewage. "Welcome to our Waaayste Treecatmunt Fuuciiilit-ee," the operator, Brian, told me in his slow, southern drawl.

The first stop on the grand tour was the pretreatment facility where the solid wastes are separated from the liquid wastes. Then both the effluent (the liquid wastes), and the sludge (the solid wastes), are given secondary treatment in separate facilities.

There, the sewage is left to "eat" itself up. That means that the sewage is dumped into large tanks, called the "aeration basin," and are pumped with oxygen to encourage natural breakdown of the sewage. But no chemicals are added, and no further treatment is given.

Then the liquid wastes are piped to an outfall twelve miles up the Black Warrior River—a place where I swam as a child. I looked at the bubbling milky effluent gurgling out of the basin, beginning its journey to the river, and it was sickening. I knew it had to flow downstream and that, although it was diluted in the river, it was not gone. Recreational facilities, docks, wildlife, and some other cities' water supplies were all downstream.

A senior operator at the plant, Mike Snow, told me that it takes approxi-

mately three hours for sewage to go through the treatment process and begin its journey to the river.

Only three hours.

I am skeptical about how much that really treats the sewage. Pumping it in and slushing it around for three hours and then spitting it out to the river doesn't seem like that much "treatment" to me.

To my surprise, Mike even later admitted to me that, "Basically, we're just a big septic tank—we just separate the effluent from the sludge and pump it out to the river."

In old cities all over the U.S., the sewage and storm water drain pipes are connected, so that whenever there is a hard rain, it creates too much sewage for the treatment facilities to treat. They are forced to "open the gates" and let the raw effluent flow into the river, lake, stream, ocean untreated in its raw, natural form.

Living here in the south, we know that such is not uncommon. Can you count the days in spring and summer that it rains a good deal of the day? One of the rainiest cities in the nation, Mobile, Alabama, has a major problem with this due to inadequate sewage treatment. Whenever it rains hard (which is very often), they open the gates and let the effluent flow into Mobile Bay, which just happens to be a major shrimp and shellfish (especially oysters) breeding and cultivation area.

Ever heard of cholera?

Well, these little shellfish are filter feeders. They suck in all the water around them—they are not picky—and filter whatever is in it, you know—salt, nutrients, plankton, HEAVY METALS, RAW EFFLUENT. They retain and store what they filter at no harm to themselves, but death and sickness to the humans who eat them.

But Mike assured me that on these

days, "It doesn't hurt anything to pump it out into the river because there is so much dilution in the water."

Yeah, right Mike.

Mike's supervisor, Maurice Sledge, told me that on those days "Our only solution to pollution is dilution."

But there are other solutions, Maurice. Several magazines Maurice gave to me described an alternative treatment method that is more efficient and less expensive. Why is Tuscaloosa not using that?

Especially here in the South where the weather is warm year-round, an ideal new method of treatment is available. The "microbial rock-reed filter" (or "man-made" wetlands) takes its design from nature herself—mimicking the structure of natural wetlands, utilizing water-absorbing plants to purify the water in a series of ponds.

These systems are inexpensive, efficient and produce crystal-clear water that is suitable to drink.

The sewage that goes into the secondary treatment pond is allowed to settle and aerate for three months, ample time for bacteria to eat and break down pollutants.

Remember the three hours at the Tuscaloosa plant?

Then the water is drawn by gravity into a rock-reed filter, a gravel bed that contains many nutrient-absorbing plants such as African Calla lilies and water irises. These plants rapidly absorb the water and release it into the air through evapotranspiration. For about a month, bacteria and microbes in the water attach to plant roots to further break down pollutants. Thus this eliminates the sludge and heavy metals that have to be hauled off to landfills in conventional treatment facilities.

And the design of the large ponds allows for the excessive amounts of

wqfs top 26

Compiled by Alex Millkey, Kirstie Pendergrast, and Louisa Spaventa

Band	Album
1. No Alternative Comp.	
2. Ani DiFranco	Like I said
3. Green Day	Dookie
4. Teen Beat 50 Comp.	
5. Majesty Crush	Love 15
6. Babe the Blue Ox	Je m'appelle Babe
7. US3	Hand on the Torch
8. Eric's Trip	Love Tara
9. God is my Co-pilot	Straight Not
10. Teenage Fanclub	Thirteen
11. The Hair & Skin Trading Co.	Over Valence
12. James	Laid
13. Philistines Jr.	Tarquin
14. Bikini Kill	Pussy Whipped
15. Bridget	Light this Candle
16. Chainsaw Kittens	Angel on the Range
17. Mephisto Waltz	Terra Regina
18. The Dave Mathews Band	Remember Two Things
	Wow 2
19. Boredoms	Radio
20. Naked City	
21. Chairman of the Board Comp.	
22. Les Thugs	As Happy as Possible
	Blue
23. Verve	Wrong
24. The Vacant Lot	Taking the Rough
25. Huggy Bear	w/ the Smooch
26. Swivelneck	Contacto

sewage taken in on rainy days.

These constructed wetlands originated at Disneyworld, where the treatment facility stretches over 1,200 acres and doubles as a wildlife refuge and recreational area. The man-made wetlands clean up the water supply and add to the nation's wetland reserves.

This new technology addresses and conquers all the problems that the common Tuscaloosa system has.

Tuscaloosa is in the process of build-

ing a new wastewater treatment plant, but the microbial rock-reed filter is not in the future. Instead, they are just adding a chlorination step.

But that does not remedy the problem. What about rainy days?

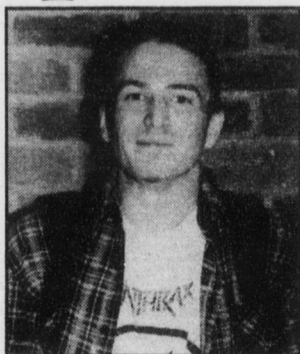
No, Maurice. The solution to pollution is not dilution. You can cut it down, split it up, or saturate it with water so it doesn't smell like sewage, or look like sewage. But it is still there.

It just doesn't float away.

The Inquiring Photographer

Daphne Lewis
Photo Editor

Q Do you think justice was served in the Bobbit case?



Photos by Daphne Lewis

"He should be punished for raping her. But it was no reason for her to do what she did."

--Hugh Nesbit, first-year



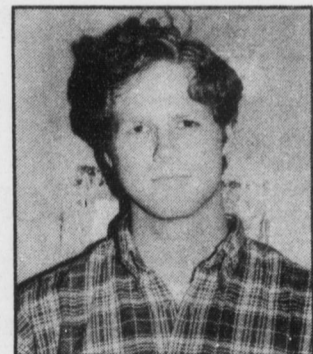
"I think she was rightly served, but he should have been punished. To get justice, she had to take it into her own hands."

--Calyta Hill, first-year



"I think the wife is guilty, because even if her husband acted in bad behavior, it is not necessary, what she did."

--Mayumi Ebina, interlink



"Before you judge, you might look at it from another perspective. If a man had chopped a woman's clitoris off, would the public's opinion change, in this case?"

--Nate Davis, junior