



Can construction runoff be contained?

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FORT MYERS, FLA — To say Charlotte county water activist Tim Ritchie is passionate about water, is an understatement.

"Water sustains life," he said.

And that passion has turned into frustration, after hearing about multiple incidents of river runoff from two construction projects off of West First street in downtown Fort Myers.

"Not only does it harm the wildlife. It's harming the river that we want to enjoy," he said.

And it's frustration that the former city councilman for the district, and newly minted Mayor Kevin Anderson shares.

"It's unfortunate and anytime it happens we find it disturbing," he said.

That said, both projects: City walk and Silver hills, have been investigated multiple times by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FL DEP), worked on multiple prevention plans and they've even been slapped with tens of thousands in fines. But ultimately, with enough rain the problem keeps popping up.

It's a cycle that makes you wonder "is this just the cost of doing business here in Southwest Florida?"

"While it may be a cost of business it doesn't mean we still shouldn't work harder to prevent it," Anderson said.

In this case, Mayor Anderson says he doesn't think these businesses are purposefully ignoring the problem, but a Real Estate lawyer, Kevin Jursinski, says there are some out there that do.

"Then if you look at it from a more skeptical approach. They just do a bottom-line number, 'What's it going to cost us to pay fines?' because we're just going to pollute the water and pay the fines," he said.

Jursinski adds that the sites need to step up their prevention plans and quick, because if runoff continues to flow into the Caloosahatchee river, there's a chance this could happen:

The remedy would be injunction where the entire project is shutdown, enjoined by a court order," he said.

It's a predicament that Ritchie says we wouldn't have to get to, if the FL DEP had cracked down on the rules with these sites from the start.

"We need more strict guidelines and enforcement," he said.