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Wastewater leaks into San Juan

NTUA: Shiprock failure caused by aging infrastructure

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SHIPROCK — Aging underground water pipes are the culprit for a leak of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority wastewater system in Shiprock Dec. 6. Some of the leak is being contained by the natural topography, but some wastewater did trickle into the San Juan River, according to NTUA.

There is no health threat nor any threat to the drinking/domestic water system in the community, NTUA stated in a news release Friday. The tribal utility company sent crews there late last week to repair the leak.

NTUA stated the drinking/domestic water distributed to the region is from the city of Farmington system and flows into the NTUA supply lines after the Farmington Treatment Plant. No San Juan River water enters the drinking/domestic water system beyond the Farmington connection.

Immediately after the leak occurred, NTUA personnel began conducting river sampling for E. coli bacteria. The sampling results indicate the wastewater leaking into the river is diluted

almost immediately, causing no apparent elevation in the normal E. coli bacteria concentrations in the river water downstream.

In compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency's public notification guidelines, however, NTUA must explain how the E. coli is used as an indicator of the possible presence of other bac-

teria harmful to human health. E. coli bacteria is a product of human and animal waste and can cause mild to severe gastro intestinal distress.

NTUA recommends people avoid the area of the spill near the NTUA lift station located about half a mile west of the San Juan River bridge. NTUA personnel are replacing the leaking pipeline and expect to have the work completed after Christmas.