

CHARLIE CRIST

13TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

www.crist.house.gov

215 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5961

696 1ST AVENUE NORTH, SUITE 203
ST. PETERSBURG, FL 33701
(727) 318-6770

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0913

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Ron DeSantis, Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis,

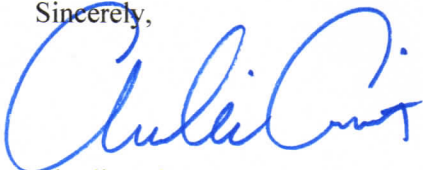
I write today regarding the horrific and potentially disastrous situation occurring at Piney Point, an abandoned phosphate plant located in Manatee County, Florida. I have been in contact with staff at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to encourage them to assist the State of Florida with water quality sampling, testing, and monitoring in Tampa Bay. It is my understanding that they have offered to provide the state with additional resources, including an independent analysis of the toxic water being discharged into Tampa Bay. Given the severity and scale of the situation, I strongly urge you to consider taking the help and directing the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to fully cooperate and work with the EPA.

As you know, a leak was detected in one of Piney Point's phosphogypsum stack containment walls on March 26 and is now at risk of collapsing. Over 300 homes and businesses have been evacuated from the area, as well as the ground floor of the nearby Manatee County Jail. Models show that a full breach of Piney Point could result in a 20-foot wall of toxic water. Should this occur, hundreds of millions of gallons of contaminated water would flood the surrounding area, devastating homes and environmentally sensitive areas.

Per your direction, the State has been pumping wastewater into Tampa Bay, informing that "the water meets water quality standards for marine waters with the exception of pH, total phosphorous, total nitrogen and total ammonia nitrogen." The millions of gallons of wastewater being dumped into Tampa Bay each day raises concerns for outbreaks of harmful algae blooms and impacts to marine life. It is also my understanding that while these discharges do not currently pose a threat to drinking water, that may change in the event of a full breach.

A full breach or a massive outbreak of harmful algae blooms in Tampa Bay or the Gulf of Mexico would be a significant threat to environmental and human health. This is not a drill. In a situation like this, we should be all hands on deck. Transparency is key. Partnering with federal agencies and making water quality data public is one way to reassure Tampa Bay residents who are fearful of what your discharges may mean for their health and their livelihoods. Thank you for your attention to this extremely serious matter.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN