



Maryland Department of Environment
Water and Science Administration
Compliance Program
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Inspector: Christopher Lepadatu
AI ID: 8449

Site Name: Back River WWTP
Facility Address: 8201 Eastern Ave, Baltimore, MD 21224
County: Baltimore County

Start Date/Time: April 22, 2024 09:30 AM
End Date /Time: April 22, 2024 12:00 PM
Media Type(s): NPDES Municipal Major Surface Water

Contact(s): Andrea Buie-Branam – Chief of ERCS, Baltimore City DPW
Scott Moffatt – Policy Analyst, ERCS, Baltimore City DPW
Chris Aiken – Back River WWTP, Baltimore City DPW
Timothy Simmons – Back River WWTP, Baltimore City DPW
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NPDES Municipal Major Surface Water

Permit / Approval Numbers: 15DP0581
NPDES Numbers: MD0021555
Inspection Reason: Follow-up
Site Status: Active
Compliance Status: Compliance
Site Condition: Additional Investigation Required
Recommended Action: Additional Investigation Required
Evidence Collected: Photos or Videos Taken, Record Review, Visual Observation
Delivery Method: Email
Weather: Calm, Clear, Good

Inspection Findings:

Introduction:

Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) is operated by Baltimore City DPW. Some areas/systems of the WWTP are operated by subcontractors including the Headworks, Denitrification Building, and Centrifuges. The facility is authorized to discharge treated effluent through Outfalls 001 and 002. Outfall 001 discharges to Back River, a designated Use II waterway. Use II waterways support estuarine and aquatic life and shellfish harvesting. Outfall 002 discharges to Tradepoint Atlantic who then discharge via three (3) outfalls under their industrial discharge permit (#05DP0064) to Bear Creek and the Patapsco River which is also designated as a Use II waterway. Final effluent

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discharge at Back River WWTP is split at a junction box and a large portion of the flow (up to 130.0 MGD) goes to Outfall 001 via a step cascading aeration system and the remaining portion (up to 50.0 MGD) goes to Outfall 002.

The current permit has been administratively extended since it expired on April 30, 2023. A revised permit renewal application (#22DP0581) was received by MDE on May 26, 2023.

Back River WWTP is an activated sludge process sewage treatment plant with biological nutrient removal by Modified Ludzack-Ettinger process, ferric chloride for phosphorous removal, denitrification filters for enhanced nutrient removal (ENR), polishing sand filters, chlorination, and dichlorination.

On this day, I met with the individuals listed above for an opening conference followed by a site walk and closing conference.

Consent Decree:

As of November 2023, Baltimore City and the Department signed a Consent Decree, Case No. 24-C-22-00386, which establishes specific goals and objectives related to the operation and maintenance of the Patapsco WWTP. As a result, maintenance items observed during the site inspection will be noted in the relevant areas of the inspection report and not itemized in the Violation(s) section as in previous inspection reports. The goals and objectives in the Consent Decree are noted below for monitoring and tracking progress. My updates during this inspection are indicated in red text. The table below has been updated with the information included in the Consent Decree Report provided on February 14, 2024.

Back River WWTP Consent Decree (CD) Overall Progress Tracking Summary				
CD Paragraph Reference	Activity	CD Deadline	Actual Date Completed	Compliance Status (11/25/23)
132-BR	Replace H2S Sensors	12/15/2023	5/16/2023	Complete
133(a)-BR	Clean and complete repairs on at least 8 PSTs to ensure they are fully functional and capable to operate as designed. * 6 units in service	1/1/2024	FM Letter Sent 12/20/23 Requested extension: 3/31/24	88%
133(b)-BR	Clean and complete repairs to all 11 PSTs to ensure they are fully functional and available for use. * In progress	12/31/2025		63%
134-BR	Baltimore City to have and maintain an adequate supply of Dissolved Oxygen ("D.O.") probes.	12/1/2023	11/7/2023	Complete
135-BR	Baltimore City shall maintain Activated Sludge Plants No. 2 & 3 as well as their associated clarifiers.	Ongoing		Compliant
135(a)-BR	Submit for review and Department approval the standard operating procedure (SOP) for removal of vegetative growth in the final clarifiers.	1/15/2024	12/15/2023	Complete
135(b)-BR	Implement vegetative growth plan.	Upon approval of 135(a)-BR		Awaiting Approval
135(c)-BR	Maintain average sludge blanket depth of 2 to 4 feet in final clarifiers.	Ongoing		Compliant
135(d)-BR	Maintain manual operations until Activated Sludge PLCs are updated and set up for automatic operation.	Ongoing		Compliant
136(a)-BR	Complete evaluation of sand filters. Within 10 days of sand filter evaluation, request approval for change of use of the approved sand filter, OR	4/30/2024		20%
136(b)-BR	Submit plan and schedule for implementation of sand filter improvements (Sand Filter Improvement Plan). Immediately upon approval City shall implement the approved Sand Filter Improvement Plan.	5/10/2024		20%
137-BR	Repair all Gravity Belt Thickeners (GBTs) to operate as designed.	6/30/2024		50%
138-BR	Repair and install one of the three non-operational Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) systems and thickened sludge pumps.	12/31/2023	12/5/2023	Complete
139-BR	Issue Notice to Proceed (NTP) with contract for rehabilitation of the egg-shaped digesters. Complete rehabilitation of egg-shaped digesters.	8/16/2023 (NTP) 9/16/2027 (Rehab)		Issued 10%
140-BR	Create and submit a Centrifuge Maintenance Plan to the Plaintiffs for review and the Department's approval.	12/15/2023	12/15/2023	Complete
141-BR	Complete repairs and installation of Centrifuge #4 to operate as designed. * some parts received, waiting on installation.	12/31/2023	FM Letter Sent:	55%

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			12/20/2023 and 2/14/2024 Requested extension: 4/30/24	
142-BR	Submit Staffing Plan	12/31/2023	12/22/2023	Complete
143-BR	City to have, maintain, and make available to the Department the formal written operation and maintenance procedures (Back River WWTP SOP)	6/30/2024		20%
144-BR	City to submit a report that identifies what processes are currently automated and conduct a feasibility study for automation of additional processes, with a plan and schedule for future automation.	5/13/2024		80%
145-BR	Baltimore City shall have, maintain, and update a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) as a functional work order system to ensure that the plant and its equipment operate as designed.	Ongoing		Compliant
146-BR	Complete a condition assessment and inventory of existing assets in order to develop an asset management program. Complete development and begin implementation of asset management program within 90 days of assessment and inventory.	11/15/2024 (Assessment) 2/12/2025 (Commence Implementation)		75% Not Started

The table above will be updated during future facility inspections.

Site Walkthrough:

Headworks

Raw sewage enters the plant at the mechanical screen building where there are four (4) coarse screening units. Each unit is rated for flows up to 200 million gallons per day (MGD). During normal flows, one coarse screening unit is sufficient to treat the average daily flow. In general, they rotate which coarse screening unit is in operation every week.

Effluent from coarse screening flows into two (2) deep wet wells that are over 50 feet deep. The headworks influent pumping station has eight (8) lift pumps installed to pump the screened wastewater from the wet wells to the Fine Screening System. During periods of high flow, screened wastewater can be pumped to two (2) above ground storage tanks each with a capacity of 18 million gallons. The two tanks are connected by two 14- to 16-inch pipes near the top of the tanks to allow one to overflow into the other as needed.

The Fine Screening System features six (6) fine screening units rated for flows up to 100 MGD each. No issues were reported with the fine screening units.

Effluent from the fine screening system travels to the Grit Removal System. Eight (8) grit channels equipped with traveling bridges remove grit from the fine-screened wastewater. Each grit channel and traveling bridge has an 80 MGD capacity. Under normal flow conditions, two grit channels are necessary for satisfactory grit removal. The traveling bridges move back and forth along the grit channel using a submersible pump / suction plate system to remove settled grit from the channels and transfer the grit to classifiers for further dewatering. The classified grit is then dried and transported off-site for disposal. No issues were reported with the grit removal system.

Odor control systems A, B, and C were reported to be in service with no issues.

Primary Settling

Effluent from the Grit Removal System flows to a junction box then to the Primary Settling Tanks (PSTs). Primary Settling is the first stage of treatment where solids and sludge are allowed to settle by gravity and any floating scum or fats, oils, and grease (FOG) is removed. Generally, PSTs are designed to remove a large percentage of the total suspended solids (TSS) and reduce the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) of the wastewater.

There are eleven (11) PSTs at the facility. During the site inspection, the following observations were made:

- Units 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 are in service.

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- Unit 5 is cleaned out, working on center well.
- Unit 6 is being dug out / cleaned out.
- Unit 8 is down for repairs – currently drained.
- Units 7 and 2 are offline while pumps at C-station (a distribution box) are being repaired.

Sludge Handling / Processing

The GSTs were inspected during this site visit. GST's 5 & 7 were in service at the time of the site inspection. GST's 2 & 4 are being used as sludge holding tanks. GST #3 is down waiting for an arm repair. GST #1 is down due to pump issues. GSTs #6 and #8 are out of service long-term in need of an overhaul.



Image 01: GST #5.

GBTs use gravity and a porous drainage belt to dewater and thicken sludge. The WWTP has 8 GBTs in total. Five (5) GBTs were reported to be in service. Repairs are in progress for the other 3 units.

The WWTP has four (4) Dissolved Air Flotation Units (DAFs) installed. A DAF unit is designed to remove TSS, FOG, and BOD from wastewater. DAFs are ideal for processing particles and floc that are of neutral density, slow-settling, or buoyant. DAF 1 was in service. The removal of floating cake in DAF 2 is complete. It was reported that there is some additional cleaning / clearing work that needs to be completed. DAF 3 and 4 are drawn down and out of service for repairs / refurbishment.

From the GSTs, GBTs, and DAF units, sludge is transferred to sludge holding tanks #1 or #26 which are located near the centrifuge building and drying facility. The facility has four (4) centrifuges in total, three (3) of which are operational. Unit #4 is still in the process of scheduling repairs and waiting on additional parts.

It was reported that sludge processing depends on the volume of sludge available as well as the dry storage capacity. Sludge Production and Disposal for the month of March 2024 was not provided in the MOR submission with NetDMR. I will follow up to include Sludge Production and Disposal Figures in the next report.

Activated Sludge Plants (ASPs)

Effluent from Primary Settling flows to a flow distribution building to one (1) of three (3) Activated Sludge Plants (ASPs) numbered 2, 3, and 4. The ASPs each contain six (6) biological reactors for nitrogen removal. ASPs 2 and 3 have a three-pass train designated A, B, and C for each reactor while ASP 4 is a two-pass system. There are twelve (12) secondary clarifiers associated with each ASP for a total of thirty-six (36) secondary clarifiers at the facility.

ASP 3 was observed during this site inspection. No issues were observed with those reactors which were online. It was reported during a previous site inspection that efforts were focused on maintaining ASPs 2 and 4. A capital improvement project is planned in the near future for ASP 3 which will take ASP 3 off-line for repairs. Chris Aiken

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shared the ASP Process Control Sheet which indicates the status of the different ASP facilities – whether the reactor is online, standby, or out of service.

ASP Process Control Sheet		
Reactor	Pass A	Pass B
ASP 2		
5	Online	Online
6	Online	Online
7	Online	Online
8	Online	Online
9	Online	Online
10	Online	Online
ASP 3		
11	Out of Service	Online
12	Out of Service	Out of Service
13	Out of Service	Standby
14	Standby	Standby
15	Online	Online
16	Out of Service	Standby
ASP 4		
17	Online	Online
18	Online	Online
19	Online	Online
20	Online	Online
21	Online	Online
22	Online	Online

Denitrification Filters (DNFs)

At the DNF building, there are four filter quads with each quad containing 13 Tetra Denitrification Filters with a total of 52 filters. It was reported that all 52 filters were functional and in operation at the time of the site inspection. It was reported that the filters are coming due to refresh the filter media and this may begin in the coming months. No issues were observed or reported.

Sand Filters

The sand filters at the facility are used to polish the wastewater coming from the DNF building. There are 48 total filters. No issues were reported with the Sand Filter system.

Chlorination / De-chlorination Facility and Final Outfalls

The final effluent at the step aeration system was observed to be clear and without any noticeable foam, solids, or odor. No visible floating scum or solids were observed in the chlorine contact chambers at the facility. The temperature of the composite samplers in service for Outfall 001 was observed to be 6°C and 4.5°C. The temperature of the composite sampler for Outfall 002 was observed to be 4.5°C.

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Image 02: Step Aeration system, final effluent.

I reviewed the lab located at the Chlorination / De-chlorination Facility. No violations were observed with the logbooks. Copies of the pH and DO calibration records were provided to me for review.

Closing Conference:

After the Chlorination / Dichlorination Facility, we returned to the administration building for an exit conference.

Records Review:

Following the site inspection, laboratory reports and calibration records were reviewed. DMRs for March 2024 were reviewed. No violations were observed in the pH and DO calibration records or the laboratory analysis reports. In the DMR submissions, the following observations were made:

1. Outfall 001, DMR Submission, March 2024:
 - a. Chronic Toxicity; permit limit, maximum, 1.02 TUc , Reported 1.1 TUc.
 - b. Reported, "For the first quarter of 2024, our facility did not pass *Americamysis bahia* (opossum shrimp) for the toxic chronic parameter (TUc)."

2. Outfall 002, DMR Submission, March 2024:
 - a. PCB; Failed to collect sample.
 - b. Reported, "...sampling for Outfall 002 was not conducted. During the 2024 first quarter sampling cycle, ALS labs collected samples for 'whole effluent toxicity (W.E.T)' for Outfall 001 only. They also sampled for the 'annual toxic chemical testing' for Outfall 001 only." It was reported that the sampling requirements have been clarified and they established that tPCBs are to be collected at both outfalls quarterly.

Non-Compliance Report(s) / Bypass Events

On March 14, 2024, the Department was notified of a spill event at Back River WWTP that occurred at 2:30 pm on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. It was reported that contractors making repairs at the sludge thickening area of the facility noticed sludge coming out of the ground near one of the buildings when they were sending sludge from Dissolved Air Flotation Tank #1 to a nearby holding tank. During this activity, it was noticed that a valve that should have been open was closed. This caused pressure to build up and break the line. The contractors stopped their operations and began cleanup. A vac truck was onsite within the hour to remove the sludge that escaped from the ground to the immediate grassy and adjacent impervious surface. It is estimated that 377 gallons of thickened sludge escaped from the broken line. No sludge from the event reached any sewer or manholes.

Previously, I reviewed the area associated with the spill reported above and I advised that a muddy area observed near the location of the spill should be investigated to ensure that the repair of the underground sludge pipe has been

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completed and the pipe is sound and functional. On the day of this inspection, I reviewed the area again and observed the same saturated area. I asked for clarification of where the repair was completed. It was reported that the pipe break was located in an underground pipe gallery so an excavation was not necessary to complete the repair. I asked for more detail and if there were any photos of the pipe failure and the resulting pipe repair to ensure it had been completed – it was reported that they would follow up with me on this. It should be noted that there were other saturated areas of ground observed around the facility in areas unrelated to any previous spills or releases.

On March 14, 2024, the Department was notified of a spill event at Back River WWTP that occurred at 2:30 pm on Tuesday, March 13, 2024. It was reported that operations was in the process of placing Reactor #9 in service. One of the clarifiers was being filled. Operations had been monitoring the process throughout the day. When a supervisor went to check on progress, the overflowing manhole was discovered. A broken line was being backfilled with mixed liquor which caused the line to leak into the manhole. Once the line filled up with mixed liquor, a downstream manhole began to overflow. Sandbags were already around the storm drain, but the mixed liquor still breached and went into the storm drain inlet which discharges to Back River via Outfall #4. The influent gate to the reactor was closed. The return activated sludge (RAS) pump flow was diverted to Reactor 10 to start draining the reactor. Sump pumps were placed in 2 manholes and pump into clarifiers to stop the overflow. Operations continued draining Reactor #9 and associated clarifiers. They also monitored both sump pumps every few hours until the sump pumps are no longer needed. Reactor #9 would not be placed back in service until there is a viable solution. The estimated amount of mixed liquor that escaped the manhole is 22,500 gallons.

The event described above occurred at the same manhole as an event which occurred on February 20, 2024, described below.

On February 20, 2024, the Department was notified of an active Sewage Sludge Overflow (SSO) event at the Back River WWTP being discovered at 12:45 pm. A large volume of flushing water was overflowing Manhole 12A (MH-12A) in the vicinity of 10B final clarifier. Back River WWTP reported in the 5-day follow-up letter that the event caused MH-12A to fill with flushing water and ferric chloride (FeCl_3) residual and overflow onto a grassy swale. The discharge then entered a nearby “at grade” storm drain inlet which discharges to Back River via Outfall #4. By 3:00 pm, a berm was created to isolate the stormwater drain from receiving further discharge. Back River reports that an estimated 11,700 gallons of flushing water discharged during this event. The cause of the discharge was reported to be a failure in a valve or pipe. To improve efforts to prevent this from re-occurring, Back River has instructed their staff to conduct more visual checks of manholes throughout the facility.

During the previous site inspection, on March 18, 2024, I reviewed the area of the sludge overflow described above. No standing water was observed near the storm drain inlet; however, I observed an accumulation of solids that appeared to be dried sludge rather than bare soil. I advised that the dried solids should be removed, and the area restored to its condition prior to the overflow. It was reported that the solids observed would be removed immediately.

I observed this area on the date of this inspection and found most of the solids had been removed; however, there was a small area of dried solids remaining along the sandbags. I advised that this should be addressed immediately.

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Image 03: Dried sludge near storm drain.

On March 18, 2024, during the previous site inspection, a potable water leak at the facility was reported to me. On the day of this inspection, I observed the leak was repaired and the area was clear.



Image 04: Potable water leak area. Repaired.

On March 25, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. The #8 egg-shaped digester was being bypassed due to a failed level sensor. The recirculation pump was left operational to keep the contents of the digester from settling, but this caused foaming in the digester which overflowed from the top. It was estimated that 500 gallons of foamy sludge escaped from the digester. No lasting impacts were reported or observed during the inspection on this day.

On April 2, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. The event was described as, "...flow escaping through an electrical box attached to the wall at reactor #13." It was reported that 2,400 gallons were released. On the day of this inspection, I reviewed the area where the release occurred. The area was observed to be clear with no visible lasting impacts. See Image 05 below.

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Image 05: Immediate area adjacent and downhill from release.

On April 9, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. A mobile belt filter press unit operated by a contractor experienced a release that started as flushing water and turned into a sludge leak. The release was the result of failing to close a flushing water supply when the belt press was shut down for the evening. A reported 800 gallons of sludge was spilled during the event with most of the material being contained in a 12-foot radius of the mobile unit and sludge running alongside the adjacent roadway. No lasting impacts were observed from this release during the inspection on this day.

On April 14, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. A mobile belt filter press unit operated by a contractor experienced a release of sludge that escaped the containment area of the unit. This mobile belt filter press unit is different from the one mentioned in the above non-complying discharge event that was reported on April 9, 2024. This unit is located near GST#8. It was reported that a pump became energized and flow went from 0 to 300 gallons per minute of sludge while the belt filter press was not in operation. An estimated 9,000 gallons of sludge was released and ran down the road to a wetland area on site. On this day, I reviewed the belt filter press and the area affected.



Image 06: Mobile belt filter press unit.

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Image 07: Lime residue at the end of the affected road.



Image 08: Wetland area at the end of the road.

In the wetland area at the end of the road the odor of sewage sludge was present and the area was covered with a fine, gritty material that is consistent with sewage sludge. It was reported that the areas of standing water observed are not usually found there and that the material and standing water was the result of the spill. It was reported that the mobile belt filter press contractor had managed the vac truck and cleanup efforts and apparently left this area untouched. **This material is in a position that is likely to pollute Waters of the State which is a violation of Environmental Article § 9-322.**

On April 17, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. Treated effluent used as sealing water for pump systems spilled while a private contractor was performing repairs in an area at C station. The sealing water line had been turned on and the line remained energized resulting in sealing water escaping from a nearby manhole. The cause of the event was a clogged deep manhole system. An estimated 100 gallons of sealing water (treated effluent) escaped the system and ran down the edge of a nearby road. Other contractors were called in and the deep manhole system was unclogged. No lasting impacts were observed from this release during the inspection on this day.

As of November 2023, Baltimore City and the Department have signed a Consent Decree – Case No. 24-C-22-00386 which establishes specific goals and objectives related to the operations and maintenance of the Back River WWTP. As a result, maintenance items observed during the site inspection will be notated in the relevant areas above and not itemized in the Violation(s) section as in previous inspection reports.

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Violation(s):

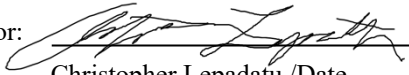
With respect to the above authorization, the following violations of Environment Article Title 9 by Baltimore City DPW were observed on this date with corrections needed immediately:

1. On April 14, 2024, a non-complying discharge event was reported at Back River WWTP. A mobile belt filter press unit operated by a contractor experienced a release of sludge that escaped the containment area of the unit. An estimated 9,000 gallons of sludge was released. On the date of this inspection, April 22, 2024, material attributed to the release was observed in the affected wetland area. NPDES permit Special Conditions, II.J., "Wastewater Discharges to Groundwater," establishes that the permit does not authorize the permittee to discharge any type or quantity of wastewater to the groundwater of the State. The permittee must make every effort to prevent any type of leakage or discharges to the groundwater system from the wastewater treatment lagoon(s) and/or other conveyance system. **The residual material observed at the wetland affected by the sludge release on April 14, 2024, should be removed immediately and the area restored to its condition prior to the release.**
2. In the DMRs reviewed, the facility has failed to meet final effluent limitations for Outfall 001A. NPDES permit Special Conditions, II.A.1., "Effluent Limitations, Outfall 001A," establishes maximum and minimum effluent limits for effluent water quality discharged from Outfall 001A. In the March 2024 DMR submission for Outfall 001A, the reported Chronic Toxicity was 1.1 TUc. The permit limit is <1.02 TUc. **Investigate the failure to meet final effluent requirements and make the necessary changes to bring the facility's final effluent into compliance.**
3. In the DMRs reviewed, the facility has failed to collect a sample for Outfall 002A. NPDES permit Special Conditions, II.A.2., "Effluent Limitations, Outfall 002A," establishes maximum and minimum effluent limits and monitoring requirements for effluent water quality discharged from Outfall 002A. In the March 2024 DMR submission for Outfall 002A, the quarterly average tPCB value was not reported. Instead, the DMR indicated, "Failed to Sample/Required Analysis Not Conducted." **Ensure that all required sampling, monitoring, and analysis is completed as required by the permit.**

A follow-up inspection will be conducted.

Contact this Inspector upon implementation of the requested corrective action(s), reasonably necessary to bring this site into compliance. If the corrective action(s) cannot be completed within the prescribed time frame above, you should continue to advise the Inspector, at least every 30 days, of the status of the measures taken to complete the corrective action(s). If you have any questions, need assistance, or to request a re-inspection, please contact this Inspector by phone, 410-537-3521, or email, christopher.lepadatu@maryland.gov.

STATE LAW PROVIDES FOR PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS OF MARYLAND ENVIRONMENT ARTICLE TITLE 9 FOR EACH DAY THE VIOLATION CONTINUES. THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT MAY SEEK PENALTIES FOR THE AFOREMENTIONED VIOLATIONS OF TITLE 9 ON THIS SITE FOR EACH DAY THE VIOLATION CONTINUES.

Inspector:  5/7/2024 Received by: _____
Christopher Lepadatu /Date
christopher.lepadatu@maryland.gov
410-537-3521
Signature/Date

Print Name