



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Cecil County Man Pleads Guilty to Tampering with Samples and Falsifying Information at Wastewater Treatment Plant**

**BALTIMORE, MD (November 20, 2020)** - Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today announced that John Oliver Moon, of Elkton, pleaded guilty in the Circuit Court for Cecil County to six counts related to tampering with wastewater treatment sampling methods and falsifying information at a wastewater treatment plant located at 91 Johnstown Road in Elkton. The falsified records masked the actual, excessive amount of *E. Coli* discharging from the plant into Dogwood Run. Cecil County Circuit Court Judge Jane Cairns Murray sentenced Moon to a total of two years incarceration, all suspended; three years probation; and fines totaling \$60,000, suspending all but \$10,000, to be paid to the Maryland Clean Water Fund.

Moon was a licensed operator and responsible for general administration of the plant. As part of his duties, he was responsible for conducting daily monitoring and collection of the monthly sample to be submitted to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). From 2015 through 2019, the submissions to MDE showed continued violations for excessive levels of Nitrogen and repeatedly documented nonfunctioning equipment. However, Moon's submission routinely resulted in virtually no detectable levels of *E.Coli*, which was overwhelmingly inconsistent with the levels regularly reported prior to when Moon took over operation of the plant.

The plant fell under increased scrutiny in July 2018 after a series of overflows caused untreated waste to run onto surrounding properties. On July 2, 2018, citizens reported overflowing sewage running from the primary lagoon. In the required follow-up report to MDE by Moon, he wrote that the "cause of the discharge was due to extensive rain and a failing wastewater system." During that period, Moon continued providing water samples and daily reports for submission to MDE, all showing nondetectable levels of *E. Coli*. However, sampling gathered by MDE and the local health department showed extremely high levels of *E.Coli*. Moon ultimately admitted that he was not taking the samples and readings as required, and further stated that he would intentionally increase chlorine levels, acknowledging that he did so to avoid problematic results.

The Attorney General thanks Environmental Crimes Chief Investigator Thomas Waugh and Assistant Attorney General Kory H. Lemmert for their hard work on this case, in addition to the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland Natural Resources Police for their assistance.