

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, September 24, 2025.

The Washington Department of Ecology has fined the Port Townsend Paper Company (PTPC) \$20,000 for two separate spills of untreated and potentially harmful wastewater into Port Townsend Bay earlier this year. The violations are the latest in a series of infractions tied to the mill's wastewater management practices. According to state officials, the pulp and paper mill released approximately 1,000 gallons of condensed water from its steam system into the bay in early January, followed by a much larger discharge of approximately 114,000 gallons of untreated process wastewater in April. Both incidents violated the facility's state-issued water quality permit, which requires wastewater to be treated before discharge into nearby waters.

Department of Ecology spokesperson Brittany Goodsell said, "These spills did not occur at the designated discharge point, where regular sampling and monitoring ensure environmental protection. The good thing is that the company responded quickly once the leaks were detected. On both occasions, they shut down equipment and made repairs to the pipes that caused the discharges." Despite the swift responses, state regulators maintain that the spills represent clear violations of environmental law and underscore the importance of maintaining infrastructure to prevent such incidents.

This is not the first time Port Townsend Paper has come under scrutiny for environmental infractions. In 2023, the Department of Ecology issued two penalties to the mill for similar water quality violations that occurred in 2022. Those earlier incidents also involved untreated discharges into the bay, raising concerns about recurring problems in the mill's wastewater handling systems. Port Townsend Paper Company operates a large industrial wastewater treatment plant as well as a smaller sanitary system to handle the significant volumes of water used in the production process. The mill, which employs around 300 people, produces approximately 1,000 tons of unbleached paper, containerboard, and pulp each day.

Port Townsend Bay is a vital part of the local marine ecosystem and a resource for recreational and commercial activities, including fishing and shellfish harvesting. Discharges of untreated wastewater pose significant risks to this delicate environment. While the mill is allowed to discharge treated wastewater at a single, permitted location, complete with sampling protocols and monitoring to ensure safety, these two recent spills occurred outside of the permitted discharge point, according to Goodsell.

Goodsell said, "There could be lots of different things in there that could be harmful to the marine ecology." Environmental advocates have long expressed concerns about the mill's emissions and wastewater management. While Port Townsend Paper Company plays a significant economic role in the region – operating continuously for over 90 years – critics argue that tighter oversight is needed to balance industrial activity with environmental protection. Under Washington law, Port Townsend Paper has 30 days to either pay the \$20,000 fine or appeal the penalty to the Washington Pollution Control Hearings Board. The Department of Ecology emphasized that financial penalties are not intended to punish businesses but to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and protect natural resources.

As regulatory scrutiny continues and public awareness grows, Port Townsend Paper Company's environmental practices are likely to remain under the spotlight. The outcome of any potential appeal and the company's response to the latest violations will be watched closely by both regulators and the local community.

Reporting by Scott France

And finally we have the Jefferson County *Beacon*'s Event of the Week: The Housing Solutions Network is hosting a Housing Happy Hour tonight, Wednesday, September 24 from 4:30 until 6pm at Social Fabric Brewing, 948 East Park Avenue in the business park. Housing is the number one problem, and the only way we're going to solve it is by working together towards a solution. For more information go to <https://housingsolutionsnetwork.org/>.

Not your jam? The *Beacon* features a community calendar filled with amazing things to do in Jefferson County. Do you have a cool event you'd like to add to the calendar? Go for it! Our calendar is always free to use.

Speaking of "free to use" the Jefferson County Beacon's newsletter is free to YOU! Get it in your inbox every Tuesday morning. Go to the bottom of the Jefferson County Beacon web page (<https://www.jeffcobeacon.com/>) and sign up with your email address.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the Jefferson County *Beacon*. This is Nigel O'Shea. Thanks for listening.