

Volunteers scoop up Indian River Lagoon's rotting fish



Jim Waymer, FLORIDA TODAY 6:26 p.m. EDT March 23, 2016



(Photo: MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY)

For this type of fishing, there's no bag limit — other than what the bag can hold.

Frustrated fishermen, saddened coastal residents and waterfront restaurateurs gloved up and bagged countless rotting fish Wednesday to fend off the largest Indian River Lagoon fish kill in decades.

On Wednesday, Brevard County put dumpsters at several locations, where the public can dispose of the dead fish washed up along the lagoon banks this week.

The dumpsters will be picked up daily and the fish hauled to the landfill to be buried so that nearby residents are spared the odor.

The county is targeting cleanup efforts in Sykes Creek; Cocoa Beach; Snug Harbor south of Cocoa Beach; Windjammer Court in Merritt Island; and Grand Canal in Satellite Beach.

For the fish floating, in most cases it's best to let them sink, officials said.

"We're not encouraging people to get out in the water and collect fish," said Don Walker, spokesman for Brevard County. "But we're going to at least do what we can because we know it's a public nuisance."

The St. Johns River Water Management District used nets to scoop up dead fish by boat in the Thousand Islands area of Cocoa Beach. And the Brevard County Sheriff's Office marine unit used 10 to 15 inmates to clean up fish in the Port Canaveral area.

Meanwhile, Cocoa Beach officials urged residents not remove the fish, citing the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's recommendation to "allow nature to run its' course."

"Between the wind, currents and natural decomposition the fish should sink to the bottom of the canals shortly," city officials said in a release.

But if a resident just can't stand the stink and have already bagged some of the fish, the city has provided a dumpster at Ramp Road for the fish to be disposed of safely.

Officials urged people not to touch the fish with bare hands and to double-bag the fish before putting them into the dumpsters.

Some living along the water wonder what's next.

Pamela Erdos noticed one of the pod of dolphins swimming very slowly Wednesday morning near her River Bend condo in Cocoa Beach.



"They never swim that slow," Erdos said. "It really looked very sick. I'm sure those dolphins are eating that or they have nothing to eat, so they're next. It's horrible what's going on."

Teresa Jablonski, a biologist with Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute in Melbourne Beach, called to assess the situation.

From what she learned of the situation, Jablonski said the dolphin's behavior was not unusual. And Hubbs hasn't had any dolphin strandings or deaths associated with this week's fish kill.

"I just think people are concerned because of the overall situation right now," Jablonski said. "She's concerned. I'm concerned."

Contact Waymer at 321-242-3663 or jwaymer@floridatoday.com Follow him on Twitter [@JWayEnviro](https://twitter.com/JWayEnviro) (<http://www.twitter.com/JWayEnviro>)

Want to do something about all the dead fish pilling up along the banks of the Indian River Lagoon?

How about putting on some gloves, bagging up some dead fish and hauling them to a local dumpster?

On Wednesday, Brevard County put dumpsters at several locations, where volunteers can dispose of the dead fish washed up on the lagoon banks this week.

The locations will be as follows:

- Bicentennial Park, 801 W Cocoa Beach Causeway, Cocoa Beach
- Kiwanis Island Park, 51 Kiwanis Island Park Rd, Merritt Island
- Kelly Park, Merritt Island, 2550 N. Banana River Drive
- POW/MIA Park, 5995 N. U.S. 1, Melbourne, at Pineda Causeway
- Eau Gallie Causeway (will add an extra dumpster there)