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The Stouffer Report: *E. coli Cover-up or Confusion?*


State officials have had their hands full lately. One item of concern surrounds the state's oversight of E. coli monitoring at a popular tourist destination.

In recent weeks, the news has been filled with stories about the Missouri [Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR), the governor's office and a report regarding E. coli at the Lake of the Ozarks. Every time something new is learned, about a dozen questions are asked.

Regardless, "the lake" remains a safe and popular tourist and retirement destination for the entire Midwest.

This controversy started in late May, when DNR did a regularly scheduled test of E. coli levels. As it turned out, the levels were unusually high. However, as the story goes, the information was not immediately released to the public. Instead, a month would pass before anyone outside of DNR and the governor's office were made aware.

The Missouri [Attorney General](#)'s office then stepped in and did its own investigation. They found nothing was in violation of the law. The Senate Commerce, Consumer Protection, Energy and the Environment Committee then began an inquiry to see if anything needs to be changed in the way the laws are currently written. The panel is still meeting, and its chair claims DNR leaders have been less than cooperative.

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In the meantime, an assistant director and a communications member for DNR have left their posts. The former assistant has attempted to take the blame for himself. However, the former communications staffer has told the Senate committee more people were aware of the report than had stated before.

The governor then stepped in and said the state would put more efforts into ensuring something like this would never happen again. In the meantime, several newspapers started looking at the timelines that have been given by varying people involved with the report. Some said it did not add up.

By the end of September, the governor told the media he had been given incorrect information. He suspended DNR's director and ordered a full-out investigation into DNR and its practices. As this press conference played out, members of the governor's communications staff and his Chief of Staff admitted someone in their office knew all along but decided it was not information that needed to be passed on to the governor.

The bottom line is this: To honor taxpayers and the rules that have been established, the state and its employees must follow the law. In addition, folks do make mistakes. Often, in politics, it is the cover-up that causes the controversy.

At the end of the day, however, Missourians should treasure "the lake," and continue to demand their elected officials and state employees behave in an ethical and timely manner.

Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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