

SAVE THE REEFS
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Vero Beach, Florida

August 21, 2003

David B. Struhs, Secretary
Department of Environmental Protection
State of Florida
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

VIA FIRST CLASS MAIL & FACSIMILE [(850) 245-2128]

Dear Secretary Struhs:

Save the Reefs is concerned about recent reports of a telcom cable cutting in the vicinity of environmentally sensitive resources off Vero Beach. When insufficiently anchored cables are cut, there is a danger they will impact adjacent coral structures.

One of AT&T Corporation's transatlantic cables was allegedly cut by a dredging vessel engaged in beach renourishment. Severed and unanchored, fiber optic cables can move with ocean currents, damaging sensitive marine species as they respond to sea currents and tides.

We have heard that it took nearly two (2) weeks to repair the severed cable, and that no federal oversight was conducted under the auspices of the FCC's Submarine Cable Landing License. The accident supposedly occurred when the dredge equipment broke while excavating near the cable, and accidentally severed the line. The dredge was thought to be removing sand from a spot in which it did not have authorization to operate, because the sand was superior to the materials available in the designated borrow pits. AT&T allegedly sent a plane aloft after the incident and located the dredge adjacent to its cable, confirming a violation.

The dredge's cutter head was also reportedly found in the mangled remnants of the fiber optic cable. Public monies allocated for beach renourishment were diverted to repair the cable.

Has Florida's Department of Environmental Protection followed up on this incident? Are you coordinating with the Federal Communications Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine the extent of the damage to adjacent corals, and the status of the adverse impact under Corps and FCC jurisdiction? Who from the State of

Florida will handle the investigation of the dredging company, and is AT&T jointly liable for any damage committed to the reef?

I do not believe anyone even checked if there was any reef damaged adjacent to the cable. Who knows how far the cable was dragged?

Very Respectfully,

Mike Blatus
Save the Reefs, Vero Beach, Florida