

Ensuring Cleaner Urban Waterways

The goal of a new permitting process is to shape future investments to end harmful overflows from combined sewers

By Daniel M. Kennedy, Assistant Commissioner, Water Resources Management, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Water quality protection has been a priority for the Christie Administration and, over decades, the state has provided billions of dollars in funding for the upgrade of urban water and wastewater infrastructure.

But because most of our combined sewer systems are old and buried under streets, roads and buildings in densely populated areas, we are confronted with enormous logistical and financial challenges to eliminate these systems. As a result, these combined sewer systems discharge some 23 billion gallons of untreated sewer waste every year during severe weather events or system malfunctions.

That's why the DEP is taking steps to improve water quality in urban areas through a new permitting process. Sewerage systems operators will be required to develop long-term strategies to greatly reduce and better control overflows into our local rivers and bays.

On March 12, we issued 25 new permits to 16 municipalities and nine wastewater utilities to address their 217 combined sewer overflow (CSO) discharge points in 21 counties. The permit will be effective on July 1, 2015. We feel strongly that compliance with these new permits will have a tangible, positive impact on our water quality and quality of life.

Most CSO discharge points are in the New York-New Jersey Harbor region, although there are more than a handful in southern New Jersey, as well. Combined sewer systems share underground piping networks, most of which are more than 100 years old, which direct both sewage and stormwater to a central treatment system before discharge to a body of water. However, fol-

lowing heavy rains or a snowmelt the sewer systems are often overwhelmed and discharge an untreated mixture of sewage and stormwater.

While permit holders are already required to screen the larger pieces of material from entering waterways, these discharges still often contain high levels of material we don't want to see in our water. This includes trash, human waste, pathogens, nutrients, oxygen-demanding organic compounds, oil, grease, and other pollutants that can harm people's health, our water quality and the recreational use of urban waterways. The overflows can also have an economic toll, closing shellfish beds, and causing fish kills and beach closures.

After a long process of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2, DEP developed these new permits which require the development of Long Term Control Plans to eliminate CSOs or greatly lessen their impacts.

These strategies will identify the most cost-effective manner to address CSOs and integrate planning with other community goals. They can include gray infrastructure projects, such as holding tanks or lagoons, to store stormwater for later release. Operators can also develop green infrastructure projects, such as rain gardens and green roofs, to capture stormwater so less enters piping systems.

A multi-agency approach We are encouraging multi-agency collaboration for projects. We are also providing \$500,000 in principal forgiveness loans through the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Funding Program (NJEIFP) for the development of regional integrated plans.

These new permits allow for the plans to be completed within three to five years. We feel this pragmatic approach will give communities an opportunity to establish their priorities and financially-sustainable long-term capital investment strategies for each service area. It will also help integrate planning with other community improvement goals, such as green space development.

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We're very excited to have taken these first steps. In January, in partnership with the U.S. EPA Region 2 and New Jersey Future, we sponsored a workshop for permit holders, municipal officials and community organization at the Rutgers-Newark campus. We were encouraged by the high level of interest and the great feedback we received on how to reduce the impacts of CSO discharges. We have continued to engage permittees through the development of the permits and we will continue to provide training, assistance and support going forward.

Planning From here, the CSO permittees will take a deep, technical dive into developing plans that will have the best long-term return on investment for their communities. They can include flood management plans and neighborhood beautification. Municipalities will be empowered to work with their neighbors

beautification of city streets.

Real-time information The new permit also requires municipalities and system operators to implement enhanced public notification strategies, should an overflow occur, to protect public health. They'll need to provide real-time information about potential discharges into rivers and other waterways for everyone's safety.

The ultimate goal of the permit is to

have Long Term Control Plans in place that will shape future strategic investments and end harmful overflows into our waters. We know there will not be quick fixes. But the plans we are requiring will result in efficient and intuitive steps to address a long-standing issue and fulfill the Administration's goal of protecting the quality of our waters for the good of our residents. ♻️

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and regional wastewater utilities to craft solutions that fit within the unique context of each community or service area.

We are pleased with the feedback we have received in our efforts to improve water quality. Ocean County Freeholder Director Gerry P. Little wrote in an op-ed in the Asbury Park Press that DEP should be "commended for taking this very significant step."

The benefits of a New Jersey with fewer combined sewer systems go well beyond improved water quality. It will also translate into a reduction of sewer service interruptions, unpleasant odors and sewer backups. By integrating stormwater management with green infrastructure investment, impacts from localized flooding will be reduced. There can be greater recreational use of urban water bodies and

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With the support of the MEL Safety Institute, Gregory and Judith led the effort to make a series of training programs for camp counselors available online — well in advance of the busy summer season. Programs cover a broad range of safety issues that counselors face every day — short, informative and easy to understand, and available on demand for a group or an individual.

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