

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SNAPSHOT: June 1, 2011**

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### **TREADING DANGEROUSLY - MUNICIPALITIES AND OUTDATED SEWER SYSTEMS**

A recent enforcement action taken by EPA and the Connecticut DEP illustrates the growing need for municipalities to pay attention to their aging wastewater systems and infrastructure.

Under a settlement on April 27, 2011, the town of Greenwich will pay a \$200,000 penalty and undertake significant rehabilitation projects to repair a wastewater collection system that serves three of the town's major wastewater pump stations. The agreement stems from alleged Clean Water Act violations, resulting from two major ruptures of the town's sewer system in 2005 and 2008, both causing the release of raw sewage into Cos Cob Harbor. The town must also evaluate the need to replace other sections of the main, as additional penalties for future failures of the system are possible.

EPA considers the environmental and human health risk of old sanitary sewer systems to be a top enforcement priority. EPA has taken a number of enforcement actions throughout New England to address discharges, with a goal to use enforcement and assistance to eliminate sewage overflows and to bring municipal sewer systems into full compliance with the Clean Water Act. Regarding the Greenwich case, Curt Spalding, the regional administrator for EPA's New England office states: "EPA expects all municipalities to pay particular attention to critical elements of their wastewater infrastructure. As this situation showed, a failure in the system can result in millions of gallons of untreated sewage being released directly to the environment." Connecticut Attorney General George Jepsen also stated: "It is the continued goal of my office to ensure that the rivers of the state and the Long Island Sound are protected from pollution and we will continue to work cooperatively with our federal counterparts to enforce the laws that protect our water resources."

In today's economy and with many municipalities facing budget crises, an upgrade of existing infrastructure may not make it to the top of the priority list. However, ignoring these potential problems could cost more in the long run. State and local authorities will continue to make this an enforcement priority, resulting in financial penalties and forced action upon communities. A proactive stance on these issues could not only save communities huge expense, but will also improve and sustain the water quality and health of their immediate and surrounding environment for years to come.

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