

Report to Congress on Impacts and Control of Combined Sewer Overflows and Sanitary Sewer Overflows

Fact Sheet

EPA has published a Report to Congress on the impacts and control of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs). This report was published to comply with a request from Congress. This report summarizes what is known about the characteristics of CSOs and SSOs, the human health and environmental impacts of CSOs and SSO, and the resources spent and technologies used by municipalities to reduce the impacts of CSOs and SSOs. This report makes clear that EPA views CSOs and SSOs as threats to human health and the environment. This Report provides interested parties with a wealth of information on the impacts of sewer overflows and establishes a baseline of data for regulatory agencies to use in policy making related to the management of sewer collection systems.

Why is EPA publishing this Report to Congress?

EPA prepared this Report to Congress in response to a statutory requirement established on December 15, 2000. Section 112 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, P.L. 106-554, required EPA to provide a report summarizing:

- (A) the extent of the human health and environmental impacts caused by municipal combined sewer overflows and sanitary sewer overflows, including the location of discharges causing such impacts, the volume of pollutants discharged, and the constituents discharged;
- (B) the resources spent by municipalities to address these impacts; and
- (C) an evaluation of the technologies used by municipalities to address these impacts.

What is a CSO?

A combined sewer system is a wastewater collection system, owned by a state or municipality, that is specifically designed to collect and convey sanitary wastewater (domestic sewage from homes as well as industrial and commercial wastewater) and storm water through a single pipe. During precipitation events (e.g. rainfall or snowmelt), the systems are designed to overflow when collection system capacity is exceeded, resulting in a combined sewer overflow (CSO) that discharges directly to surface waters.

Today, there are 746 communities with combined sewer systems with a total of 9,348 CSO outfalls that are identified and regulated by 828 NPDES permits. Combined sewer systems are found in 32 states (including the District of Columbia) and nine EPA Regions. CSO communities are regionally concentrated in older communities in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions. EPA estimates that about 850 billion gallons of untreated wastewater and storm water are released as CSO each year in the United States.

What is an SSO?

A sanitary sewer system is a wastewater collection system, owned by a state or municipality, that is specifically designed to collect and convey only sanitary wastewater (domestic sewage from homes as well as industrial and commercial wastewater). In such systems, storm water is conveyed through an additional set of pipes. These systems can overflow when collection system capacity is exceeded due to wet weather (as the result of infiltration and inflow), when normal dry weather flow is blocked for any of several reasons, or when mechanical failures prevent the system from proper operation.

In the Report to Congress, EPA estimates that between 23,000 and 75,000 SSOs occur each year in the United States, resulting in releases of between 3 billion and 10 billion gallons of untreated wastewater. These events take place throughout the United States.

What does the Report to Congress say?

This report includes 10 chapters covering all aspects of the statutory requirement from Congress. The report also includes a series of 23 technology descriptions providing detailed information, including case studies, on technologies for reducing the impacts of CSOs and SSOs.

This report finds that CSOs and SSOs can have impacts on human health and the environment at the local watershed level. The report makes clear that the United States has made progress in reducing sewer overflows to protect human health and the environment. Much remains to be done, however, to fully realize the objectives of the Clean Water Act and the CSO Control Policy

What impacts do CSOs and SSOs have?

Because CSOs contain raw sewage along with large volumes of storm water and contribute pathogens, solids, debris, and toxic pollutants to receiving waters, CSOs can create significant public health and water quality concerns. CSOs have contributed to beach closures, shellfish bed closures, contamination of drinking water supplies, and other environmental and public health concerns

Because SSOs contain raw sewage and can occur on land and in public spaces, SSOs can create public health and environmental concerns. SSOs have contributed to beach closures, contamination of drinking water supplies, and other environmental and public health concerns.

What recommendations does the Report to Congress make?

This report does not make specific policy recommendations, but does suggest four strategies that should be taken to reduce the impacts of CSOs and SSOs. The strategies include: providing adequate funding for maintenance and improvement of the nation's wastewater infrastructure; integrating of wastewater programs and activities at the watershed level; improving monitoring and reporting programs to provide better data for decision-makers; and supporting stronger partnerships among federal and state agencies, municipalities, industry, non-governmental organizations, and citizens.

How can I get more information?

You can find the Report to Congress and additional information on the Internet by visiting <http://www.epa.gov/npdes>. You can ask for hard copies of these documents by calling the Office of Water Resource Center at (202) 566-1729.