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Title: EPA TAKES ACTION TO PROTECT THE NATION'S BEACHES FROM HEALTH THREATS POSED BY RAW SEWAGE OVERFLOWS

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EPA TAKES ACTION TO PROTECT THE NATION'S BEACHES FROM HEALTH THREATS POSED BY RAW SEWAGE OVERFLOWS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today took action to protect public health and the nation's beaches and waterways from disease-causing organisms and contamination that occurs from 40,000 raw sewage overflows each year. EPA specifically is taking action to reduce the sewer overflows that can lead to beach closures by proposing significant improvements in the operation and maintenance of the nation's sewer systems.

EPA Assistant Administrator J. Charles Fox, said, "Each year, too many beaches in America must be closed due to contamination by raw sewage that threatens public health. Overflowing sewers are the major contributors to this problem. Today's action is a step toward ensuring that sewer systems across America will be improved to help keep our beaches safe for swimming."

Today's proposal comes in response to President Clinton's May 1999 executive action to improve water quality and public health by developing stronger measures to prevent sewage spills, the major cause of beach closures.

In 1999, nearly 1500 of the nation's beach closures and health advisories were due to sewage overflows, threatening public health, family vacations, recreational use of waterways and billions of tourist dollars.

As part of EPA's commitment to the public's right-to-know, today's proposed rule would require that the general public, health and other community officials be notified immediately of a health-threatening raw sewage overflow.

Overflowing untreated sewage can contaminate rivers, lakes, and coastal waters and threaten drinking water supplies, as well as back up into homes, resulting in

expensive property damage to homeowners and communities.

A sanitary sewer overflow is a release of sewage from a collection system, including pipes, before it reaches a municipal wastewater treatment plant. Sewer overflows are a chronic and growing problem. Many of the nation's urban sewage collection systems are aging; some sewers are 100 years old. Many systems have not received the essential maintenance and repair necessary to keep them working properly.

The proposed rule would require improved management of capacity and maintenance programs to reduce sewer overflows by strengthening current Clean Water Act permit conditions for over 19,000 sewage treatment plants around the country. The proposal would require 4,800 "satellite" sewage collection systems to get permits for the first time. Cities would be required to develop and implement plans to improve plant performance, encourage new investments in infrastructure, as well as perform a number of technical upgrades. EPA would clarify that communities have limited protection from enforcement in very rare circumstances.

EPA estimates that this rule would impose an additional total cost for all municipalities of \$93.5 million to \$126.5 million each year, including costs associated with both planning and permitting. A collection system serving 7,500 people may need to spend an average of \$6,000 each year to comply with this rule.

EPA will take public comment for 120 days on the proposal. Additional information including fact sheets and the Federal Register notice will be available at: <http://www.epa.gov/water> under "What's New."
