



At a Glance

Why We Did This Project

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) performed this audit based on a congressional request to examine the city of Atlanta's compliance with requirements of the 1998 Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) consent decree, and EPA Region 4's oversight of the city's consent decree compliance.

CSOs occur when untreated or partially treated human and industrial waste, toxic materials, and debris mix with stormwater and flow into surface waterbodies. The consent decree also addressed Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs), which occur when sewage escapes sewer systems and flows into streets and surface waterbodies.

The consent decree directed Atlanta to develop and implement maintenance programs, construct wastewater treatment infrastructure, and report progress to the EPA and the state of Georgia.

This report addresses the following:

- *Ensuring clean and safe water.*

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Atlanta Is Largely in Compliance with Its Combined Sewer Overflow Consent Decree, but Has Not Yet Met All Requirements

What We Found

Atlanta, Georgia, completed its CSO capital improvement projects by 2008 and complies with current reporting requirements, but the city has not yet achieved all consent decree requirements. Atlanta continues to work on sewer system construction projects under a 1999 amendment that deals primarily with Atlanta's sewer collection system, including the separate portion of the sewer system. The city has until 2027 to complete those projects.

Decreases in sewage overflows from Atlanta's wastewater treatment facilities and sewage transmission pipes reduce the risk of city residents being exposed to pathogens.

Atlanta's CSO system continues to experience periodic violations of its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits due to high levels of fecal coliform, operations-related errors leading to high levels of chlorine in treated wastewaters, and missed water quality tests. SSOs continue to occur and pose risks to human health and the environment. Untreated household and human waste continues to be released into city streets and surface waters during SSO events.

EPA Region 4 coordinates with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (Georgia EPD) to implement the document review and inspection oversight controls established in the consent decree. The consent decree requires Atlanta to submit quarterly reports to EPA Region 4 and the Georgia EPD, which the city is providing. In addition, Region 4 chairs quarterly meetings to discuss the implementation of the consent decree with the city and the Georgia EPD. The Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, a co-plaintiff in the case and party to the settlement, can also attend these meetings.

Based on the results of our analysis, we have no recommendations.