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Maine Does Well Controlling Sewer Overflows

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Environmental Protection

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(AUGUSTA)—In a USA Today news story, Gannett News Service analyzed federal data on enforcement actions and fines related to sewage overflows from January 2003 to February 2008. The data indicated that \$35 million in fines were levied by federal and state regulators at hundreds of large sewage treatment facilities.

The article reported no fines were levied in Maine and eight other states including Arizona, Hawaii, Kansas, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

“This analysis indicates that compared to the rest of the nation, Maine is doing a good job in terms of controlling illegal sewer overflows,” stated Andrew Fisk, Director of the Bureau of Land and Water Quality at the Department of Environmental Protection.

The USA Today story explained that there are two types of sewer overflows, sanitary sewer overflows and combined sewer overflows (CSOs). Sanitary sewer systems are designed to carry only wastewater from toilets, sinks and showers. But these systems can overflow when excess water forces its way into the pipes through cracks or improper connections. “Maine communities do sometimes experience sanitary overflows and our Department uses a variety of tools to correct these occurrences including enforcement actions with penalties where appropriate,” explained Fisk.

CSOs come from combined sewer systems, many of which are more than 100 years old, that carry sewage and storm water in the same pipes. During wet weather, the volume of sewage and water becomes too much for the pipes to handle. In those conditions, the system is designed to allow the mixture to bypass the treatment plant and flow directly into local waters through outlets called combined sewer outfalls. State and federal law requires entities with CSOs to abate them.

Fisk stated, “Maine and the northeast states are national leaders in terms of progress on CSO control. 97% of our CSO communities have approved and mandatory abatement plans in place. Seven Maine towns or utility districts have won national recognition by the EPA for their work on CSOs.”

Examples of progress on CSOs include: \$304 million expended to date, \$23 million in 2007 alone 25 communities have completely eliminated CSOs The number of CSO outfalls has been cut by 46% since 1989. CSO overflow volume per inch of precipitation has decreased by almost 2/3rds since 1989.

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“However despite this impressive progress, communities will need an additional \$60 to \$80 million to complete their abatement plans. There are real impacts from CSOs including impacts to beaches along the coast.”

The seven recognized Maine municipalities and districts are, Augusta, Auburn, Bangor, Bath, Brewer, Lincoln and Saco.

The link to the USA Today story is

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-05-07-sewers-facts_N.htm

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