

**Statement of
The Honorable Timothy H. Bishop
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“The Raw Sewage Overflow Community Right to Know Act”
October 16, 2007**

Today, the Subcommittee will hold a hearing on the importance of public notification of sewer overflows, such as those provided in the Raw Sewage Overflow Community Right to Know Act. Public notification of sewer overflows is an important topic that has not received the attention it rightly deserves.

I agree with the suggestions of our witness from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District that the best way to avoid human health and environmental concerns from sewer overflows is to ensure that they never occur in the first place.

I am proud that the first Subcommittee markup of the new majority was to approve legislation to restore the Federal commitment to our nation's wastewater infrastructure. With documented needs of between \$300 to \$500 billion for wastewater infrastructure improvements nationwide, the cost of repairing and replacing our nation's infrastructure is daunting and will not be successful without increased Federal support. It should come as no surprise that reauthorization of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund is one of this Committee's highest priorities.

However, that is only half the story, because even with significant increases in investment, sewer overflows will likely continue to occur. Therefore, it is equally imperative that we provide our citizens with comprehensive and timely notification of sewer overflows.

The Environmental Protection Agency's own numbers on annual sewer overflows is staggering. For combined sewer systems, EPA estimates that 850 billion gallons raw or partially treated sewage is discharged annually into local waters.

For separate sanitary sewer systems, EPA estimates that between 23,000 and 75,000 SSOs occur per year in the United States, discharging a total volume of three to 10 billion gallons per year. These discharges, laden with potentially harmful chemicals, pathogens, viruses, and bacteria, often wind up in local rivers and streams, city streets, parks, or in unfortunately cases, directly into peoples' homes.

We need to make sure that the public is aware of sewer overflows to give individuals the opportunity to stay out of harms' way. It makes no sense for certain owners and operators of local sewerage agencies to know where and when overflows are occurring, but to avoid making this information readily available to the public. This defies common sense.

I was pleased to read the testimony of three of our witnesses here this afternoon which discussed their individual state and local governmental experiences providing enhanced public notification of sewer overflow. As these witnesses will later describe, enhanced public notification of sewer overflows is a common-sense measure to protect public health and

environment, that one that can be achieved without a significant burden to state and local governments. Notification of sewer overflows provides the public the greatest opportunity to avoid direct contact with potentially harmful chemicals, pathogens, viruses, and bacteria, as well as, facilitates rapid response to overflows in order to minimize the potential harm to the environment.

We need to replicate these success stories across the nation. This is the premise behind the commonsense legislation that I, Mr. LoBiondo, and many of my Committee colleagues have introduced, and hopefully something that we can unanimously approve through the Subcommittee in the near future.

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