

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRWOMAN EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT  
HEARING – EFFORTS TO CONTROL URBAN STORMWATER RUNOFF  
MARCH 19, 2009, 10AM  
2167 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**

Good Morning.

I call the Subcommittee to order.

Today's hearing examines efforts to control urban stormwater runoff. In many parts of the country, stormwater is a growing problem that impairs both city budgets, as well as nearby waters. Arresting the urban runoff problem will result in significant and immediate improvements to public health and the environment.

Stormwater runoff is the water associated with a rain or snow event that runs over the ground and eventually enters a water body.

In a natural environment, most precipitation is absorbed into the ground before it enters streams and rivers.

However, in urban environments it is a very different matter. The large amounts of impervious surfaces in cities results in significant quantities of stormwater entering stormwater and sewer systems. Running across streets, urban runoff picks up sediment, oils, grease, and a host of toxic pollutants. As cities grow, impervious surfaces become larger. This results in greater flows and volumes of stormwater – as well as increased pollutant loadings.

These large flows of stormwater are usually dealt with in one of two ways. In some communities, they are discharged directly into water bodies – without the benefit of treatment. As a result, streams and rivers are continuously buffeted by whatever pollutants happened to lay on the city streets at the time.

In other cities, the stormwater is added to wastewater and should ultimately be treated by a wastewater treatment facility. However, during many wet weather events, raw sewage and stormwater are intentionally discharged directly into local waters before treatment, so as to not

overwhelm the system. These are known as Combined Sewer Overflow events, and, as might be expected, they represent serious threats to public health and water quality.

In order to mitigate the impacts of stormwater and C.S.O. events, cities across the country have chosen a variety of different approaches. Some cities have reengineered their sewers into separate pipes that carry sewage, and pipes that contain stormwater. Other approaches, used by some of the cities represented here today, involve building giant tunnels that will temporarily store combined sewage and wastewater – rather than discharging it untreated into water bodies. Both of these engineering-based approaches are very expensive and can be long-term propositions.

In this time of economic uncertainty and tight municipal budgets, it may behoove city planners to look in other directions for ways to deal with the impacts of urban stormwater runoff. Among these alternate approaches is

the incorporation of green infrastructure, or low impact development approaches.

Green infrastructure approaches take a very different view to stormwater control. Instead of engineering the stormwater system to deal with increasingly large amounts of stormwater, these low impact development approaches utilize technologies that aim to reduce the amount of stormwater that even enters the system. This is achieved through processes that encourage enhanced infiltration and evaporation processes. Simple approaches such as green roofs, increased tree cover, disconnecting downspouts, and adding more green space can go a long way to reducing the amount of stormwater that enters sewers. And in some circumstances, these technologies can realize significant cost savings for municipalities and building owners.

Nevertheless, many of these technologies are new and have not been applied in all conditions and cities. I hope to hear testimony today that will answer a few key questions:

First, what barriers exist with regards to the increased adoption of green infrastructure technologies and approaches?

Second, what can the federal government – both EPA and the Congress – do to reduce those barriers?

And third, what process does EPA use, and should EPA use, in balancing the need to promote promising new technologies, while at the same time protecting water quality?

I look forward to this morning's testimony from our two panels of excellent witnesses. I would like to extend a special welcome to the Mayor of my own city of Dallas, Mayor Leppert. Thank-you for appearing here today, and sharing with us the experiences of Dallas.

I now yield to the Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Mr. Boozman.