

**Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation  
Combined Sewer Overflows - Frequently Asked Questions (4/10/2017)**

**1. What are combined sewer overflows?**

Municipal systems that collect both sewage and stormwater in the same pipes are called combined sewer systems. During intense storms, the high flow of sewage and stormwater can overwhelm combined sewer systems. Many combined systems were therefore designed to release excess flow through overflow points, called combined sewer overflow (CSO) outfalls. Without these CSO outfalls, large storms could cause sewage and stormwater to backup into basements and streets.

**2. How is the State of Vermont addressing combined sewer overflows?**

The State of Vermont has vigorously pursued a strategy to raise awareness of CSOs and to incentivize municipalities to mitigate and eliminate CSOs, including:

In June 2016, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) developed a new subscription service on its [wastewater discharge website](#) that enables any person to receive immediate notice of a combined sewer overflow event. DEC supported legislation that requires municipalities to provide CSO alerts within one hour of discovery and a full report of the CSO event within 12 hours, and permanent signage at CSO outfalls. [2016 Act 86](#) (H.674).

In September 2016, DEC adopted a [Combined Sewer Overflow Rule](#). Since the adoption of DEC's Combined Sewer Overflow Policy in 1990, the number of CSO outfalls has dropped from 171 to 63. Pursuant to the 2016 Rule, the Department will use "NPDES" permits to require the 16 municipalities that still have CSOs to implement technology-based controls, and "10 V.S.A. § 1272 orders" to require municipalities to develop Long Term Control Plans to abate and control CSOs, and to bring all CSOs into compliance with federal and state water quality standards.

In the 2017 Capital Bill, the House proposed to fund over \$1.3 million in municipal pollution control grants (25% match) for CSO projects in Springfield, St. Johnsbury, Middlebury, Rutland City, and St. Albans.

**3. Will the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources' rule on combined sewer overflows reduce the amount of sewage that municipalities discharge into lakes and rivers?**

Yes. Municipalities that have combined sewer overflows will be required to put in place Long Term Control Plans to bring their CSOs into compliance with all federal and state standards, which will reduce the amount of untreated sewage that reaches lakes and rivers.

**4. Does the 2016 Combined Sewer Overflow Rule require municipalities with combined sewer and stormwater systems to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to separate their sewer and stormwater systems?**

The Rule acknowledges that financial capability is a significant factor in abating and controlling overflows and meeting water quality standards. As such, the Rule specifically recognizes alternatives to separation of stormwater and sewer lines, including: adding storage tanks or retention basins to hold overflow during storm events; expanding treatment plant capacity; adding screening and disinfection facilities for the overflow; and incorporating green stormwater infrastructure to reduce stormwater flow.

**5. Are combined sewer and stormwater systems better for water quality than separate systems?**

Not always. Under normal weather conditions, combined sewer systems treat and disinfect stormwater before it is discharged into lakes and streams. However, when combined sewer systems are overloaded during storms, combined sewer systems discharge untreated stormwater and sewage into the waters of the State. The discharge of untreated wastewater under wet weather conditions can adversely affect water quality and may create short-term public health concerns. Some CSOs are worse than others; the CSO Rule requires prioritization of projects based on adverse impacts to water quality and public health.