

Report slams federal response to raw sewage dumped into Lake Erie

Environmental groups call for action

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• By: Ron Regan

CLEVELAND - Ohio environmental groups and sewer district officials Monday criticized federal efforts for failing to prevent raw sewage from being discharged into Lake Erie.

In a report issued by the Great Lakes Coalition, Cleveland was one of five Midwestern cities affected by sewage overflows.

More than 31 billion gallons of raw sewage is discharged into Lake Erie every year, according the environmental and sewer district officials.

Meanwhile, Congress has reduced funding for clean water programs by half in just 10 years, according to the report.

In the report, entitled "Turning the Tide," the coalition called for increased federal funding of "green infrastructure" -- a system that includes constructing bioswales and pervious pavements that allows polluted stormwater to be filtered by soil rather than runoff into Lake Erie.

Bioswales act like a sponge and can greatly reduce the amount of raw sewage draining into sewer systems.

"If you were to take a sponge and put it in a bowl of water it would soak up the water," said Kristy Meyer, Director of Clean Water programs for the Ohio Environmental Council. "That's kind of like green infrastructure. It's slowly absorbing the water and slowly releasing it, while at the same time filtering out pollutants."

One example of a green infrastructure is as simple as a parking lot that is landscaped and drained properly.

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District has already spent more than \$1 billion to improve its treatment facilities, but says it needs projects like this to help reduce the overflows.

"We can add landscape amenities back to the community as we fix combined sewers," said Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells, Sewer District Watershed Manager. "So Ggreen the region and at the same time fix the problem."

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Rep. Dennis Kucinich said at a news conference that he will be asking for additional federal spending that will include green infrastructure programs.

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