



FACT SHEET: BALTIMORE CITY'S SEWER SYSTEM CONSENT DECREE

- Baltimore City's sewer system is more than one hundred years old. This aging infrastructure discharges millions of gallons of raw, untreated sewage into Baltimore's streams and Harbor each year, polluting local waters and the Chesapeake Bay and harming public health.
- The sewer system utilizes more than 3,000 miles of sewer lines and 110 pumping stations to transport sewage to wastewater treatment plants operated by the City of Baltimore.
- Though cutting edge when it was installed in 1909, Baltimore's sewer pipes are cracked, clogged, and undersized for today's needs.
- In 2002, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) sued the City of Baltimore as a result of repeated sewer overflows. As a result of this lawsuit, that same year Baltimore City signed a [consent decree](#) with EPA and MDE requiring it to fix the sewer system and prevent illegal discharges by 2016.
- Under the terms of the consent decree, Baltimore City can be fined by MDE and EPA up to \$15,000 every time there is an illegal sewage discharge. With appropriate corrective action now, the risk of fines will be lessened.
- The City has made progress and is actively making repairs. However, only three years remain until the original consent decree deadline, and much work remains to be done to fix Baltimore's sewer system and stop repeated, significant sewage spills.
- Between 2010 and 2012, Baltimore City reported discharging more than 7 million gallons of raw sewage into Baltimore's streams and harbor. This number does not include millions of additional gallons of sewage spills from stormwater outfalls and two sewage overflow structures. This also does not include sewage overflows that went undetected by the City.
- Blue Water Baltimore and local citizens have been reporting sewage overflows and other violations to EPA and MDE for almost a decade, with several of the same issues still occurring today. Most recently, Blue Water Baltimore met with EPA to discuss six specific, egregious sewage spills and their concern about compliance with the 2002 consent decree and missed deadlines.
- The media has reported that Baltimore City is in negotiations with MDE and EPA to revise the terms of the 2002 consent decree. It is believed that the City is requesting extensions on its deadlines in the consent decree to perform certain construction projects/fixes to its sewage infrastructure and that the request is to extend the ultimate deadline of the consent decree from 2016 to 2019 and beyond.
- The federal Clean Water Act allows citizens to intervene or "join" in lawsuits, like the present case that resulted in the consent decree under which the City is currently operating.