

For Immediate Release  
August 9, 2010

Contacts:

Kristy Meyer, Ohio Environmental Council, (cell) (614) 638-8948, (work) (614) 487-7506  
Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, (216) 881-6600 x 6414  
Kristen Trolio, Tremont West Development Corporation, (216) 575-0920  
Katherine Holmok, URS Corporation, (216) 622-2336  
Jordan Lubetkin, Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, (cell) (734) 904-1589

## **Cleveland on the Front Lines of Sewage Crisis, According to a New Report**

Cleveland, OH – Environmental, elected officials, business leaders, sewer district leaders, and civic leaders gathered in Cleveland’s Tremont neighborhood today to urge federal public officials to do more to tackle a sewage crisis that is dumping billions of gallons of untreated sewage into the Great Lakes every year.

Cleveland is one of five Midwestern cities profiled in a new report that examines what can be done to curb sewage overflows, including the use of “green infrastructure” to safeguard public health and create jobs—while protecting Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes. The report is authored by the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition; it is available at [www.healthylakes.org](http://www.healthylakes.org).

“Cleveland is on the front lines of a sewage crisis,” said Jordan Lubetkin, communications director for the Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition. “This report underscores the severity of the problem and offers manageable solutions so that communities can safeguard people’s health, create jobs and uphold our way of life.”

The report, “Turning the Tide: Investing in Wastewater Infrastructure to Create Jobs and Solve the Sewage Crisis in the Great Lakes,” chronicles how, four decades after Congress passed the federal Clean Water Act, communities that rely on the Great Lakes for drinking water, economic development and recreation dump tens of billions of gallons of untreated sewage every year into the world’s largest source of surface freshwater.

Discharges of untreated sewage occur when rain overwhelms combined sewer systems that collect and treat storm water and sanitary sewage. When that happens, cities allow untreated sewage to flow into area waters rather than flooding homes and businesses. Combined sewer overflows, or CSOs, are one of the most serious pollution problems facing the Great Lakes. These discharges sicken people, force beach advisories,

prompt health advisories urging people to stay out of polluted rivers, harm wildlife, and hurt tourism.

Cleveland's bout with sewage discharges is explored in the report. The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the largest sewage district in Ohio, has spent nearly \$1 billion in recent years to upgrade its treatment system. This has successfully reduced the volume of its CSOs by about 4 billion gallons annually. While technology exists to prevent sewage overflows, eliminating additional discharges of about 5 billion gallons a year would cost an additional \$4.3 billion. Like Cleveland, most cities simply cannot afford to lay enough sewer pipes or dig enough storage tunnels and retention basins to prevent combined sewer systems from overflowing during storms.

The officials and advocates agree that the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District cannot solve this daunting problem by itself. That's why they are calling on Congress to adequately fund the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which provides low-interest loans for sewer upgrades.

"For nearly four decades, the Sewer District has worked tirelessly to reduce combined sewer overflows from 9 billion to 4.5 billion gallons," said Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells, Manager of Watershed Programs, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. "We're committed to further reducing overflows and providing an economic benefit to the region through targeted implementation of green infrastructure."

Finding the money to pay for such work has become more difficult in recent years because Congress has cut funding for sewer improvements. Congress has reduced funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund by half in just ten years, from \$1.35 billion in 1998 to \$689 million in 2008. (Under a federal funding formula, the Great Lakes states receive about 36 percent of funds.) While the fund was increased to \$2 billion last year, current funding levels are far short of what is needed to help local communities fix antiquated sewers.

"The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District has been working with local communities to try a variety of approaches, including using more green infrastructure, to prevent storm water from overwhelming sewers and pushing raw sewage into Lake Erie", said Kristy Meyer, Director of Agricultural & Clean Water Programs, Ohio Environmental Council. "While the green infrastructure program is in its infancy, the region is taking steps in the right direction. Congress now must provide the funding to undertake these solutions."

The report criticizes the federal government for failing to adequately fund the nation's wastewater infrastructure and saddling communities in the Great Lakes basin with a \$23.3 billion shortfall to fix their waste and storm water infrastructure. Ohio, alone, faces \$5 billion in costs, second only to New York, according to U.S. EPA estimates.

Leaders in Cleveland and Ohio are urging the federal government to boost funding for popular programs like the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, joining the call by the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition to fund the program at \$2.7 billion, with a 20% set aside for green infrastructure projects, for fiscal year 2011.

“Congress has an historic opportunity to provide a shot in the arm to local communities,” said Meyer. “We look forward to working with Ohio’s Congressional delegation to push for robust funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. Failure to act will make the problems worse and the solutions more costly.”

“Turning the Tide” includes case studies of how cities are installing rain gardens, vegetative roofs, and pervious pavement to prevent storm water from overwhelming city sewers. Increasingly, the report notes, communities are embracing this “green infrastructure” to help enable the natural landscape to absorb storm water.

“Not only does green infrastructure reduce stormwater contributing to sewage overflows, but it also has a multitude of added economic and social values by revitalizing neighborhoods, attracting investments, and enhancing the quality of life for residents in distressed neighborhoods,” said Katherine Holmok, Landscape Architect, URS Corporation.

For instance, as part of a local effort funded by Neighborhood Progress, Inc., the URS Landscape Architecture Group provided pro-bono design and installation assistance to the Tremont West Development Corporation to redesign a proposed public/private parking lot to include bioswales and pervious pavements.

Working from an existing site plan prepared by others using standard grey infrastructure practices, URS Corporation modified the grading & site plan to include an 8-foot wide bioswale that would capture all the stormwater runoff from the parking bays (0.46 acres) and infiltrate the runoff through existing sandy soil beach ridge. The 8-foot wide bioswale will infiltrate all stormwater for a 2 year storm and reduce overall peak discharges for other storm events by 44%.

Inclusion of green measures produced an overall cost savings for the project by reducing pipe sizes and reducing the number of catch basins used. This allowed the contractor to install the lots using concrete rather than asphalt – reducing the heat island effect and increasing the life span of the parking lot.

“With the construction of the new parking lot, we saw a great opportunity to introduce green infrastructure to the neighborhood,” said Kristen Trolio, Community Organizer/Model Blocks Manager, Tremont West Development Corporation. “It is the first project of its type in our neighborhood and it demonstrates an innovative solution—which saves money, restores nature, and beautifies our community.”

The report also looks at the incredible potential to create jobs and generate economic benefit from investments in traditional and green infrastructure. Every \$1 billion invested in wastewater infrastructure, according to sources in the report, creates at least 20,003 jobs. Stopping sewage overflows is a priority for the regional Great Lakes restoration strategy that provides a 2-to-1 return on investment, according to the Brookings Institution.

“Investing in Ohio’s wastewater infrastructure makes good sense for the environment and the economy,” said Meyer. “All we need to do is act.”

“Turning the Tide: Investing in Wastewater Infrastructure to Create Jobs and Solve the Sewage Crisis in the Great Lakes” is being released by the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition in partnership with the Ohio Environmental Council. It is available at [www.healthylakes.org](http://www.healthylakes.org).

-end-

The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit [www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org).