

July 21, 2009

Infrastructure

Ontario environmental group adds support to call for sewer upgrades

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The call by an environmental group for Ontario to create an infrastructure fund echoes a similar conclusion in a recent industry association report looking at incorporating sustainability in infrastructure investment.

Ontario should create a Great Lakes Green Infrastructure Fund to help reduce the billion litres of raw sewage released into the Great Lakes annually, states Ecojustice, formerly known as the Sierra Legal Defence Fund.

The environmental group's recently released report found that approximately 18 billion litres of sewage was dumped from Ontario sewage treatment plant bypasses in 2006. The following year, 15 billion litres were discharged, with at least eight municipalities releasing more than a billion during that time period, according to Ontario Ministry of Environment estimates cited by Ecojustice.

"In order to mitigate these impacts and adapt to climate change, immediate investment in sewage infrastructure is needed to improve treatment and increase the capacity of Ontario's sewage systems and decrease the frequency and volume of CSO (combined sewer overflows) and bypass events," the report says.

Ecojustice concludes that sewage dumping is a problem that is "unlikely to improve without serious investment, particularly as climate change leads to more frequent storms that overwhelm combined sewers systems."

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) recently commissioned a report that looked at incorporating sustainability in infrastructure and the energy costs of deferred maintenance in municipal water systems.

Among the report's recommendations was creation of a fund for expediting the renewal of energy-wasting facilities.

This would help renew outdated facilities and improve energy saving and environmental impacts.

"Our researchers said they were pleased to see Ecojustice come to similar conclusions they did as it concerned setting up a green infrastructure, fund" says Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO. "They presented a case for urgency which was important as well."

The RCCAO report found that 25 per cent of all treated drinking water in Ontario leaks into the ground because of aging pipe infrastructure with a \$700 million annual cost burden on ratepayers.

The link between antiquated and inefficient water and sewer infrastructure and the amount of sewage discharged is hard to ignore, concludes Ecojustice.

According to Ontario Spills Action Centre's sewage bypass reports, Niagara Falls, Ont. released seven billion litres of untreated or undertreated sewage in 2007 alone. Other cities topping a billion litres of

sewage discharge during 2006-7 were Hamilton (five billion), Windsor (4.3 billion), Welland (3.9 billion), Toronto (2.7 billion), Greater Sudbury (2.6 billion), London (1.8 billion) and Leamington (one billion).

“It is important to note that it is expected that larger and older cities are likely to have more sewage and antiquated sewer and stormwater systems and thus greater amounts of sewage released than smaller and newer cities,” concludes Ecojustice. “However, as the data demonstrates, this is not always the case despite not being a large city compared to others in this report; Niagara Falls reported almost seven billion litres of bypasses in 2007, far surpassing any other community in the province.”



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