

Georgia Department of Natural Resources **Environmental Protection Division**

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Georgia EPD Announces New Permits For Atlanta's Combined Sewer System

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) announced today the reissuance of permits for the city of Atlanta's combined sewer system (CSS), which carries both domestic wastewater and rain water runoff. The permits address the city's combined sewer discharges during heavy rain events.

The reissuance of the permits follows an extensive public process in which EPD issued draft permits and then scheduled a ten-week period for collecting comments and a public hearing. Revisions to the permits were made based on some of those comments.

"The permits contain discharge limits and other requirements that are protective of water quality standards and are in compliance with the Clean Water Act," said EPD Director Jud Turner. "To reduce confusion and controversy, the permits also include a clear definition of a combined sewer overflow, which is in line with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) definition."

Atlanta has two permits for its CSS, because the West Area and the East Area systems are not connected. Discharges are only authorized during rain events. The permits prohibit all discharges from the CSS during dry weather.

When it's raining, the CSS is designed to carry wastewater from homes and businesses as well as rain water runoff to a wastewater treatment plant where it is highly treated to safe levels and discharged to a stream. During heavy rain, the volume of water can exceed the capacity of the treatment plant, so some of it is diverted to a Combined Sewage Control Facility for treatment prior to discharge. Under both of these conditions the CSS performs better than separated sewer systems because the rain water runoff is also treated before being discharged. On rare occasions very heavy rainfall may overwhelm the system and those discharges that do not receive proper treatment are defined as combined sewer overflows.

"These new permits reflect the improvements the city has made to the CSS and include provisions to limit combined sewer overflows to four per year averaged over a three-year period," said Jac Capp, chief of the EPD Watershed Protection Branch. "Before 1998, the city reported 60 overflows per year in the West system as compared to five overflows in the last six years."

The permits require the city to plan and implement specific best management practices, ordinances and green infrastructure to further reduce the magnitude, frequency and duration of overflow events and to reduce the amount of metals being discharged from the CSS. If an overflow event occurs, the city is required to promptly report details of that overflow with signage at the site, at public access points downstream and on the city's website.

(More)

The permits also require instream monitoring for biological oxygen demand, temperature, ammonia, total residual chlorine, total suspended solids, total phosphorus and pH (acid).

Since the late 1990s because of the overflows, Atlanta has been operating its CSS under the requirements of a federal consent decree. The new permits include provisions that are consistent with the consent decree and with federal combined sewer overflow regulations. After reviewing the draft permits, EPA Region IV Water Protection Division Director James Giattina said, "The EPA commends Georgia EPD in drafting permits that build on the significant and steady progress to control combined sewer overflows. The permit limits together with the integrated planning requirements and the utilization of green infrastructure will continue to improve Atlanta's waterways."

The city has separated storm water and sewage pipes in most areas so that only about 10 percent of the city still has a CSS. What remains serves the highly-developed downtown area where removing it is not practical. Atlanta is one of 772 cities in the nation with a CSS, including two others in Georgia: Albany and Columbus.

The permits and related materials can be viewed at <http://epd.georgia.gov/watershed-protection-branch-permit-and-public-comments-clearinghouse-0>.

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