

## RAW SEWAGE IN NEW JERSEY WATERS

### The Water Looks So Pretty; Why Can't We Go In?

Every year approximately 23 BILLION gallons of raw sewage are dumped into New Jersey's rivers, mainly the Hudson, Passaic, Hackensack, Raritan, and Delaware rivers. Sewage (or wastewater) is the water from residents' toilets and sinks, as well as untreated industrial waste and untreated rain water (stormwater) that has animal waste, oil, pesticides, and other contaminants in it. As little as a twentieth of an inch of rain can send dangerous mix of bacteria and pollutants straight into many of New Jersey's rivers (and then the bays and eventually the ocean). Contaminating the water with sewage is not only bad for the animals that live in the water, but anyone who touches the water by splashing, kayaking, swimming, or fishing can get terribly sick. People can get skin or eye infections, hepatitis, and dysentery, among other things. This is why-- even with access to these rivers--one often can look but not touch.

### Ewww! Why Would Raw Sewage Go Into the Water?

Combined Sewer Systems are old infrastructure that was designed to channel stormwater runoff, industrial wastewater and domestic sewage through the same pipe, instead of through separate pipes (which is modern practice). These combined sewer systems are found throughout many older communities, including many towns in New Jersey. Under dry conditions, the wastewater is treated at a sewage treatment plant and then discharged into a water body such as a river. When it rains, or snow melts, water flowing from impermeable surfaces such as roofs, streets, and paved areas can quickly overload the combined systems. The combined sewer system is designed to overflow and dump excess untreated wastewater through an outfall (a big, open pipe), directly to area rivers. This untreated discharge is called a "combined sewer overflow," or CSO. In short, dirty and hazardous water is getting dumped directly into the rivers and bays.



### How Do I Know if It Is Safe to Go in the Water?

You don't! The water is not always dangerous, but for the rivers (and beaches along Raritan and Newark Bay that are not official "swimming" beaches), there is no system to tell people when it is or when it is not safe to go in the water. In fact, the State of New Jersey does not even test these rivers and bays to determine whether or not they are safe. There are usually no signs showing people where the sewage enters the water and no warning system to tell people when the water is unsafe.

### Why Doesn't Somebody Stop This?

The CSO problem is not only disgusting and dangerous, it is illegal. The Clean Water Act requires the "use of the best available technology" to make water safe for swimming and fishing, among other uses. The State of New Jersey knows that there is a sewage issue and has been "working on" the CSO problem for 30 years with almost no progress. New Jersey has the worst program in the country to tackle CSOs and the State's main strategy is to merely "study" the problem. The problem has been studied, causes identified, and technology is available to fix it: it's time for action. Fixing the CSO problem is not free but it must be done. The towns that currently put sewage in the water must either implement aggressive low impact design programs to capture stormwater and keep it out of the sewers (as many cities in other states have done) and/or upgrade their sewer systems. Fixing the CSO problem represents an investment in New Jersey's future as it will create jobs, turn our rivers and bays into tourist and recreation destinations, and protect the health and safety of our residents.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1. Visit our web site [www.nynjbaykeeper.org](http://www.nynjbaykeeper.org) and sign our Change.org petition to tell the Commissioner Martin of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection that 30 years is long enough to find a way to keep raw sewage out of our waterways! New Jersey residents deserve to have swimmable and fishable water.
2. Keep your own stormwater out of the sewage system by planting rain gardens, using rain barrels and using other “green infrastructure.” Urge your town to implement low impact design
3. The EPA knows that New Jersey has been “studying” the CSO problem for long enough and has been urging the State to take action. Contact EPA and encourage it to use its oversight authority and force the State of New Jersey to comply with the Clean Water Act. Please email Region 2 at [RA@epamail.epa.gov](mailto:RA@epamail.epa.gov).
4. If you’re on Facebook, join the groups I Use New Jersey’s Waters and I Hate Combined Sewer Outfalls to discuss these issues and access information as it becomes available.



## NY/NJ BAYKEEPER®

[nynjbaykeeper.org](http://nynjbaykeeper.org)

NY/NJ Baykeeper is the citizen guardian of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary. Since 1989, Baykeeper has worked to protect, preserve, and restore the environment of the most urban estuary on Earth - benefiting its natural and human communities.

Through our Estuary-wide programs we seek to end pollution, improve public access, conserve and restore public lands, restore aquatic habitats, encourage appropriate and discourage inappropriate development, carry out public education, and work with federal and NY/NJ state regulators and citizen groups as partners in planning for a sustainable future for the Hudson-Raritan Estuary watershed.

Founded with the help of Hudson Riverkeeper and the American Littoral Society in 1989, Baykeeper is a wholly independent nonprofit with its own 501c3. Baykeeper has a full and part time staff, its own Board of Directors and many dedicated volunteers. Baykeeper is the only bi-state full time advocate for the Hudson-Raritan Estuary and Harbor.