



GET THE FACTS: COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOWS

COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOWS (CSOS)

Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) occur when sanitary and storm sewers combine during heavy rain or snow melting events, exceeding their capacity. Older sewer infrastructure that exists in some cities only separates sanitary and stormwater sewage during 'normal' flow. In heavy stormwater events, these combine and empty into bodies of water untreated. In older systems, the solution is to have an overflow outlet, usually directly into waterways, to prevent backups and flooding.

WHY ARE THEY DANGEROUS?

CSOs contain elements that are harmful to humans, including bacteria, untreated human waste (feces), industrial waste, and debris. Coming into contact with untreated wastewater can result in: [hepatitis](#), [dysentery](#), [typhoid](#), [cholera](#) and [skin issues](#). CSOs often result in beach closings, shellfishing restrictions, and other advisories.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

The expansion of cities and suburbs has led to large areas of concrete and destruction of wetlands. Water cannot be absorbed by concrete and other impermeable surfaces and contributes to a runoff problem in which excess water runs off these surfaces, collecting pollutants with it. Due to vast impermeable areas such as shopping centers, large housing developments, and metropolitan areas, this runoff can stress sewage systems, create flooding and lead to other issues.

When communities increase green spaces, add permeable paving, collect and use rainwater, and build rain gardens made of native plants, they slow the volume of runoff and aid in cleaning stormwater. Building "relief points" can keep the sewage water from backing up into homes as well.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Conserve water, especially during heavy rain events. Use rain barrels for rainwater harvesting and plant rain gardens to help reduce the volume of water and improve the quality of stormwater reaching sewers.

SOURCES:

epa.gov/npdes/combined-sewer-overflows-csos

epa.ohio.gov/dsw/cso/csoindex#116135670-what-is-a-cso

neorsd.org/about/combined-sewers-and-combined-sewer-overflow-cso-control/



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