

NEWS

Plan to cut sewage spills into Hudson moving forward

Stated goal of 15-year cleanup is water that will be safe to swim in

By Brian Nearing | June 17, 2015

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Photo: Lori Van Buren

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Sign at the entrance to for the Rensselaer County Wastewater Treatment plant on Wednesday, June 17, 2015 in Troy N.Y. (Lori Van Buren / Times Union)

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Troy

The Hudson River is a little cleaner and less likely to be polluted with sewage spills after the

first year of a long-term plan to repair aging municipal sewer systems, officials from Albany and Rensselaer counties said Wednesday.



About \$25 million in projects have been completed under a \$136 million, 15-year plan that was announced in early 2014 by the state [Department of Environmental Conservation](#). The plan covers Albany, Troy, Cohoes, Watervliet, Rensselaer and Green Island, which have about 150,000 homes and businesses.

"We've completed \$8 million in disinfection projects at the North and South plants," said [Albany County Executive Dan McCoy](#), during a news conference at the Rensselaer County sewer plant. Disinfection kills harmful bacteria found in untreated sewage.

Government grants paid for more than half that expense, he added.

"This demonstrates that Albany County and our partners are committed to supporting clean water programs, protecting public health and improving the water quality in the Hudson River," McCoy said.

Rensselaer County has installed a \$2.5 million ultraviolet light disinfection system at its sewage treatment plant, said [Martin Reid](#), chairman of the county legislature. He said the disinfection system and treatment capacity that will be added to the plant will mean less untreated sewage will reach the river in the aftermath of heavy rains.

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Those improvements also are expected to help business growth in the county, said County Executive Kathy Jimino.

A Hudson River environmental group also touted the work so far.

"Riverkeeper is encouraged by the significant work that's been accomplished in the first year of the Capital District's major effort to reduce pollution in the Hudson River," said [Dan Shapley](#), director of water quality for the group. "We all have to keep our eyes on the stated goal: Water that's safe for swimming."

For decades, the region's aging sewer systems have been fouling the river with about 1.2 billion gallons annually in rain-fueled sewage spills — called combined sewer overflows. The spills, which occur about 90 times a year, have made the Capital Region section of the Hudson its most sewage-tainted and often unsafe for swimming, boating and fishing.

The rebuilding plan aims to cut such spills by 85 percent over the next 15 years.

As part of the rebuilding plan, the municipalities also agreed to pay a \$99,000 fine for pollution violations under the U.S. Clean Water Act for past spills. Because of spills, the region's sewer systems were in violation of federal law for years.

The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) pushed for a comprehensive cleanup plan as a condition of approving new pollution permits for sewage treatment plants in Albany and Rensselaer counties, which now operate under DEC extensions rather than permit renewals. Otherwise, Rensselaer County's permit would have expired in July 2011, Albany County's in December 2011 and Watervliet's in January 2012.

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