City of Newport agrees to end sewage pollution

Environment Rhode Island declared a key victory for Newport’s beaches and harbor in August, announcing that the city of Newport had agreed to take steps to end its illegal sewage and stormwater pollution. The cleanup measures will mean fewer beach closings and cleaner water in Newport Harbor. These measures are just a part of a settlement of a federal lawsuit brought by Environment Rhode Island and four local citizens in 2007 to enforce the Clean Water Act. According to the lawsuit, Newport has repeatedly discharged illegal sewage into Newport Harbor and allowed polluted stormwater to empty into Easton’s Bay, where it contaminated First Beach and Atlantic Beach with bacteria and forced the beaches to close after heavy rains.

“Rhode Islanders treasure Newport’s waters—they are vital to our ecology, economy, and quality of life,” said John Rumpler, senior attorney for Environment Rhode Island. “The City’s decision to take responsibility for ending its pollution will be appreciated for generations to come.”

“I’d like to swim off my boat in the harbor, but the thought of what’s in the water scares me,” said Ted Wrobel, one of our four co-plaintiffs.

Cleanup plan for harbor and beaches

Change won’t happen overnight, but our settlement with Newport will go a long way toward cleaning up our beaches and coastal waters. Before the settlement was even announced, our lawsuit pushed Newport to install a new ultraviolet disinfection system at one of its sewage facilities. The upgrade will end Newport’s pollution of Easton’s Bay, and help make the waters around First Beach safer for swimming.

Next, Newport will be required to give its sewage infrastructure a comprehensive upgrade, which will end sewage overflows into Newport Harbor.

Visit our website to learn more about the lawsuit and our work to protect Narragansett Bay, and to get involved:

www.EnvironmentRhodeIsland.org/news
As a boy growing up in Rhode Island, my summers revolved around the water—whether it was building sandcastles and hitting the surf at First Beach or boating with friends in Newport Harbor.

That's why I was thrilled to announce this August that the City of Newport had finally agreed to end their illegal pollution of Newport Harbor and nearby beaches. The cleanup plans are the result of a lawsuit we filed in 2007 alongside four local residents.

Victories for the places we love don't come easily. But this win shows how much dedicated citizens can accomplish.

Of course much remains to be done—we're stepping up our work to strengthen Clean Water Act protections for Narragansett Bay and cut toxic air pollution. But I am proud of what we’ve accomplished together. I hope you are too.

Sincerely,

John Rumpler
For Environment Rhode Island

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You can be remembered as a someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment Rhode Island.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or email PlannedGiving@EnvironmentRhodeIsland.org.

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**Recent action**

**Tackling climate change**

When it comes to global warming, it's easy to succumb to gloom and pessimism, especially given the anti-environmental rhetoric and lack of action in Washington, D.C. Yet there is a way forward—and it starts in states like Rhode Island.

Rhode Island's power plants, the second-largest source of global warming pollution in the state, will reduce their emissions 10 percent by 2019 under a regional initiative we helped convince state officials to join.

Across the country, state and local governments have followed our lead by passing clean energy policies that are projected to cut more than 500 million tons of global warming pollution per year by 2020—nearly 10 percent of our nation's current emissions. In September, Energy Program Director Rob Sargent unveiled a study showing that states can cut carbon pollution by 20 percent by 2020 by adopting clean energy and transportation policies like renewable energy standards, building energy codes and expanded public transportation.

**New rules will cut air pollution, save lives**

This year the Environmental Protection Agency took major steps to cut toxic air pollution from power plants, despite intense opposition from industrial polluters and their allies in Congress.

In March, the EPA proposed the first-ever nationwide limits on mercury pollution from power plants. The new rule would require power plants to implement existing technology to cut mercury emissions by 91 percent—a huge victory, given mercury’s effects on how kids think, learn and behave. Soon afterwards in July, the EPA finalized a rule to protect communities from dangerous smog pollution, which could prevent as many as 34,000 premature deaths annually by 2014.

Polluters and their allies in the U.S. Senate fought back with proposals to block the EPA. Our staff and activists helped defeat the measures, and in July we delivered more than 600,000 public comments to the EPA supporting the mercury rule—a strong show of support as Congress keeps trying to block EPA action.

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★ The EPA moved to cut mercury pollution from power plants. At right, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson (left) with Margie Alt, director of our national federation.
Environment Rhode Island’s Courtney Abrams spoke with Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse about the challenges facing Rhode Island’s environment.

Q: Environment Rhode Island is launching a new effort to protect water quality in Rhode Island. You noted that was a concern of yours, as well.

A: Absolutely. Clean beaches and a healthy Bay are so important to Rhode Island—they gave the Ocean State its name and identity, and they are critical to our economy—our tourism industry alone generates more than $2.3 billion and supports more than 66,000 jobs per year in Rhode Island. Nationwide, America’s ocean economy contributes more to the country’s GDP than the entire farm sector.

Q: What can the citizens of Rhode Island do to help?

A: Rhode Islanders should continue to contact me and all of their representatives, to keep us informed about the issues that matter to us. Education is also very important—when you share what you know about environmental issues with neighbors, coworkers, students and friends, you expand public support for policies that will protect the environment.

To read the full interview with Sen. Whitehouse, visit www.EnvironmentRhodeIsland.org

As polluting industries push to weaken legal safeguards and Republican leaders in Congress move to block the Environmental Protection Agency from doing its job, Environment Rhode Island is delivering a firm response: Don’t mess with Narragansett Bay.

EPA moves to close loopholes

The Clean Water Act has been extremely successful in limiting pollution across the country. But legal loopholes are allowing polluters to pave over our wetlands and dump toxic waste into our streams. At the same time, polluted sewage run-off from farms, cities and construction sites flows straight into our waterways. This contaminates the waterways that we love, like the Narragansett Bay, and threatens our drinking water sources. And now, to add insult to injury, Congress is attempting to revoke the EPA’s ability to protect our waterways.

The consequences are clear: In Rhode Island alone, more than half of our streams lack protection, including those that feed into the Bay. And runoff pollution and sewage overflows caused more than 100 beach closings last summer alone.

For the past several years, Environment Rhode Island has been working to close these loopholes and restore the Clean Water Act’s ability to protect our waters. This year, the EPA responded. In April, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced a plan to close the loopholes that are allowing polluters to pave and dump into streams and wetlands that feed Narragansett Bay. And following in the footsteps of a Rhode Island state law our staff helped pass in 2007, the agency is also gearing up to set national standards that will cut sewage pollution in the near future.

“Legal warfare”

Not surprisingly, polluters immediately sprang into action to oppose this proposal. Oil companies, developers and corporate agribusiness have all urged Congress to stop the EPA from closing the clean water loophole—ExxonMobil lobbyists even met with the president to convince him to drop the issue, threatening “legal warfare” if the EPA moved forward.

Over the summer, polluters’ allies in both parties launched an unprecedented attack on the Clean Water Act in Congress. By mid-July, the U.S. House of Representatives had passed three separate measures attacking the EPA’s authority to protect our waterways.

Environment Rhode Island saw this coming, and we had already begun building a campaign to defend the EPA’s clean water initiatives. Our field organizers talked face to face with thousands of Rhode Islanders about the attacks on clean water. And we worked with our allies to mobilize 170,000 people nationwide to send comments to Washington, D.C., urging support for clean water.

As we work to protect our waters, we’ll be sure to remind officials in Washington, D.C., that Rhode Islanders want to see Narragansett Bay—and all of America’s great waterways—protected.

Don’t mess with our activists

Thousands of our activists told Congress to keep their hands off the Clean Water Act this summer—signing petitions, calling their senators, and spreading the word on Facebook.
As President Obama negotiated with auto companies to improve fuel efficiency this summer, Environment Rhode Island and our partners across the country advocated for a strong standard to make our cars go farther on a tank of gas. More than 10,000 people signed our petition in support of cleaner cars. On July 22, the president announced a new standard of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025—roughly twice as strong as the current standard.

Environment Rhode Island applauded the proposed rules, which represent the biggest single step our country has ever taken toward getting off oil. By 2030, these rules will cut our annual gasoline use by 23 billion gallons, save Americans more than $80 billion at the pump annually, and reduce our annual global warming pollution by 280 million metric tons—the equivalent of shutting down 72 coal-fired power plants.

Our Federal Global Warming Director, Nathan Willcox, had the honor of thanking the president in person for the new, tougher fuel efficiency standards.

Follow our Get Off Oil campaign:
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