



Connecticut Fund
for the Environment

Save the Sound®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Danbury sewage discharges violate Clean Water Act, CFE/Save the Sound warns

Town alleged to have discharged raw sewage, metals, bacteria in violation of federal law and state permits

New Haven, Conn. – Following an extensive investigation of sewage discharges statewide, Connecticut Fund for the Environment and its bi-state program Save the Sound has sent the Town of Danbury a 60-day Notice of Intent to Sue. Releases and leaks of sewage pollute waterways with disease-causing bacteria and excessive nitrogen that fuels dead zones in bays, harbors, and Long Island Sound.

“Our investigation has uncovered a troubling pattern of sewage discharges in Danbury that violate the Clean Water Act,” **said Jack Looney, staff attorney at CFE/Save the Sound.** “According to state records, Danbury has released raw or untreated sewage into local rivers and streams at least 66 times from early 2011 to early 2016. It has also repeatedly violated its permits for lead and other metals and for fecal Coliform bacteria. This is dangerous and unacceptable. Our letter formally puts the Town of Danbury on notice that if it does not take action to remedy these violations within the next 60 days, CFE/Save the Sound may file a citizen suit in federal court. We have reached out to town officials to discuss this matter and hope to find a resolution.”

The majority of the sewage discharges were into the Still River, which flows through neighborhoods, commercial districts, and forested areas. There were also raw and undertreated sewage discharges into Limekiln Brook, Beaver Brook, and Padanaram Brook.

Most of the bypasses were caused by blockages in various components of the sanitary sewer collection system. Other causes include repeated failure of electrical and mechanical equipment, insufficient capacity to accommodate wet weather, and inflow/infiltration. These issues indicate a lack of routine maintenance and preventative maintenance by the town.

In 2012, Connecticut passed a Sewage Right to Know Act requiring municipalities to alert the public when raw sewage is spilled or discharged into their water. Due to ongoing budgetary and staff challenges, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection missed the 2014 deadline to begin notifying the public. While we hope and believe the system will be up soon, in the meantime, the Connecticut’s citizens often have had no way of knowing when bacteria-laden discharges are released into their local streams, rivers, and harbors in a timely way.

In addition to the sewage and bacteria discharges, CFE/Save the Sound’s investigation discovered that Danbury also repeatedly exceeded its state-issued permit limit for total discharges of lead in 2015 and 2016, and its limits for total copper and zinc in 2015.

CFE/Save the Sound’s ongoing investigation covered the entire state and could result in additional 60-day Notice Letters to other municipalities violating the law.

If a lawsuit is filed, CFE/Save the Sound may seek an order from the federal court requiring the municipality take all necessary actions to come into compliance with the law, and may seek civil penalties for the city’s violations of the Clean Water Act.

“The federal Clean Water Act prohibits discharge of untreated sewage. Period,” **said CFE/Save the Sound Legal Director Roger Reynolds.** “Keeping infrastructure in good order to minimize leaks and overflows is a basic responsibility of municipal governments. If citizens know how much untreated sewage enters the streams and harbors in their own backyards, they will demand their town leaders take action.”

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