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Settlement reached in Newport water pollution case

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NEWPORT, R.I. -- Environmentalists announced the settlement of a lawsuit that sought to force the city to address the discharge of sewage and stormwater into coastal waters.

The announcement was made at a news conference at Easton's Beach Thursday morning.

Environment Rhode Island, [which brought the suit in 2008 on behalf of four residents](#), said a consent decree was filed today in U.S. District Court. After filing the lawsuit, the advocacy group was joined in its legal efforts by the EPA, and the R.I. Department of Environmental Management.

The consent decree requires the city to take steps to eliminate illegal discharges of sewage into the harbor and Narragansett Bay from its wastewater system. Because the city has an old system that collects both sewage and stormwater, heavy rains cause overflows of raw sewage when the system is inundated.

The settlement also addresses pollution problems at Easton's Beach. During heavy rains, pollutants from a moat that surrounds nearby Easton Pond are carried to the beach and contribute to closures due to high levels of fecal coliform. John Rumpler, a lawyer for Environment Rhode Island, said he city has already addressed that problem by constructing a plant across from the beach that uses ultraviolet light to kill harmful bacteria.

"Without clean water, where is Newport's tourism?" Rumpler said after the morning news conference.

EPA, estimates that the city will spend about \$25 million to address the issues. The city must also pay a \$170,000 penalty to be split between the federal and state government.

"EPA expects all municipalities to pay attention to critical elements of their wastewater infrastructure," Curt Spalding, regional administrator of EPA's New England office, said a statement. "Maintaining these municipal assets reduces the risk of service disruptions, the environmental and economic impacts associated with untreated sewage discharges and avoids the potentially higher costs to repair or replace them when they fail. This settlement will ultimately result in significant improvements to water quality and create a cleaner and healthier environment for the Newport community."

The city [reached an agreement with Middletown](#) 1½ years ago over related issues.