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Water Pollution

EPA Cites Nearly \$300 Billion 'Needs' Gap For Clean Water Infrastructure in New Survey

An Environmental Protection Agency report to Congress indicates a spending shortfall of \$298.1 billion over the next 20 years for clean water infrastructure, an increase of 17 percent from the previous survey.

The *Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2008 Report to Congress*, released every four years, provides an analysis of unfunded capital costs for wastewater and stormwater treatment and collection.

The number represents capital needs for publicly owned wastewater collection systems and treatment facilities; combined sewer overflow connection; and stormwater management. The needs were assessed as of Jan. 1, 2008.

"Maintaining and improving the nation's wastewater infrastructure is critical to making America's waters swimmable and fishable. The Clean Watersheds Needs Survey provides essential information about wastewater treatment and pollution control needs over the next 20 years," EPA said in a statement provided to BNA June 4. The agency sent the report to Congress June 2 and released it publicly June 3.

According to the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the clean water community is facing increasing financial capability and affordability problems during the economic downturn.

NACWA Executive Director Ken Kirk said June 4 in a statement, "This report makes it clear that the federal government must become a long-term partner in developing a sustainable funding mechanism to address the growing infrastructure funding gap."

Data Could Influence Senate Bill

Adam Krantz, NACWA managing director of government and public affairs, told BNA June 4 the needs survey alters the landscape for pending legislation in the Senate, which includes a funding formula based on the previous needs survey. Its effect at this point, however, is unclear, he said, although it is apparent that water infrastructure needs are much larger.

"The gap is growing but I don't know how this changes the equation state-by-state," Krantz said.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved the Water Infrastructure Financing Act (S. 1005) in May 2009, but action has been delayed because of Republican

objections to the Davis Bacon Act prevailing wage requirements for water infrastructure projects (83 DEN A-4, 5/3/10).

The bill would authorize \$38.5 billion over five years for state clean water and drinking water revolving funds and other programs to repair infrastructure and improve water quality.

The clean water state revolving fund is one of many supplementary federal, state, and local funding sources. According to the report, from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2008, EPA provided an annual average of \$1.1 billion in grants to state clean water revolving fund programs.

States combined these funds with state matching funds, bond proceeds, and loan repayments to provide assistance to local communities, mostly in the form of loans. In the same period, this assistance amounted to about \$5.5 billion annually.

According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates cited in the report for 2002-2006, local governments spent about \$15 billion annually to address capital wastewater needs and about \$2 billion annually to address capital stormwater needs.

According to the report, the needs for wastewater treatment, pipe repairs, and new pipes are \$187.9 billion, an increase of \$28.6 billion (18 percent) since 2004.

Of this increase, \$16.3 billion is for advanced wastewater treatment needs, \$7 billion is for secondary wastewater treatment needs, and \$4.8 billion is for pipe repair needs.

Aging Infrastructure Cited

"These needs increases are mainly for improvements to rehabilitate aging infrastructure, to meet more protective water quality standards, and to respond to and prepare for population growth," the report said.

"While this and prior reports show significant increases in needs, the nation is still making significant progress in providing wastewater treatment."

New Jersey, California, and New York reported the largest total needs, all close to \$30 billion, the report said. Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas each have needs in excess of \$10 billion, according to the report. New Jersey, California, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Iowa, and Utah are the states with the largest increases in needs since 2004, each with an increase of more than \$2 billion.

New York, California, Florida, and New Jersey reported almost half of the secondary treatment category and advanced treatment needs.

Similarly, nearly half of the pipe repair category and new pipe category needs were reported by California, Florida, New York, Ohio, Texas, Puerto Rico, North Carolina, and Massachusetts.

According to the report, the needs for recycled water distribution are \$4.4 billion, a decrease of \$0.7 billion (14 percent) since 2004. California and Florida account for 66 percent of those needs.

The needs for correcting combined sewer overflows are \$63.6 billion, a decrease of \$1.4 billion (2 percent) since 2004.

In addition, the needs for stormwater management are estimated at \$42.3 billion,

including \$7.6 billion for conveyance infrastructure, \$7.4 billion for treatment systems, and \$17.4 billion for green infrastructure. Stormwater management needs represent an increase of \$16.9 billion, or 67 percent, since 2004.

The needs for small communities are about \$22.7 billion, representing about 8 percent of the \$298.1 billion of total documented needs, the report said.

Over the next two years, the report said, EPA and the state clean water needs survey 2012 workgroup will plan how to alter the survey to meet emerging needs and to enhance public data access. Potential changes include tracking wastewater treatment plant energy efficiency projects and climate-change-related needs. In addition, EPA and the state workgroup will continue efforts to address the underreporting of needs, the report said.

By Linda Roeder

The Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Watersheds Needs Survey 2008 Report to Congress is available at <http://www.epa.gov/cwns/2008reportdata.htm>.

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