

# Stormwater Pollution Tackled to Improve Water Quality in Charles River

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(Boston, Mass. – Nov. 17, 2008) – EPA is taking strong action to enact the next generation of environmental protection for the Charles River by tackling pollution problems caused by stormwater.

Specifically, EPA today announced a targeted effort to apply more stringent controls on stormwater pollution in the Charles River watershed, where stormwater containing high levels of phosphorus is a chief culprit in dramatic algae blooms – including toxic cyanobacteria – that have plagued the river in recent years.

The EPA action will require certain industrial, commercial and residential facilities in the Towns of Milford, Franklin, and Bellingham with two or more acres of impervious area (parking lots, roofs, roadways, etc.) to operate under a Clean Water Act permit. EPA is accepting public comments on this action.

“Polluted stormwater runoff causes serious water quality problems, and is the next great challenge for cleaning the Charles River,” said Robert Varney, regional administrator of EPA’s New England office. “By working closely with Massachusetts and our other partners, we will make great environmental improvements, while at the same time providing facilities with flexibility and time to meet the new standards. Working together cooperatively, we can solve these problems.”

“Many of our state’s waters are severely degraded as a result of stormwater pollution,” said Massachusetts Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles. “Now is the time to take action to reduce pollution and return more water to the ground, where it will be cleaned naturally and added to our water supplies.”

In a separate but closely related action, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is enacting a statewide requirement for facilities with five or more acres of impervious area to reduce stormwater runoff. Under both the federal and state actions, new requirements will be phased in to reduce polluted stormwater runoff at sites with large paved areas, including shopping malls and industrial areas. While the statewide standard will be five acres, the state is proposing to match EPA’s two-acre requirement in the Charles, where a higher level of control is needed to address chronic water quality problems.

“Until now, managing stormwater has largely been the responsibility of the cities and towns,” said Laurie Burt, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection. “It is critical now for other property owners to step up to the plate and do their part. This new program creates a level playing field by requiring that the responsibility for managing stormwater be shared by municipalities and private property owners.”

Cities and towns across the Commonwealth have made great investments in improving their sewer and stormwater infrastructure, yielding substantial water quality benefits. Today’s actions will ensure that private landowners address significant pollution problems caused by stormwater runoff from their property, further improving water quality throughout the state.

“Our work will also help local municipalities, who up until now have shouldered the burden alone to take action to reduce pollution to our rivers, lakes and other waterways,” continued EPA regional administrator Varney.

These new steps will ensure that owners of large private facilities take responsibility for runoff from their sites. Today’s actions will also provide significant benefits to the “recharge” of groundwater sources.

The new EPA requirements are being piloted in the three communities at the upstream end of the Charles – Milford, Franklin, and Bellingham – for commercial, industrial and high-density residential facilities with two or more acres of impervious area. EPA will require these facilities to apply for a Clean Water Act permit for stormwater discharges which eventually reach the Charles River. The permits will require that these facilities reduce phosphorus discharges

by 65 percent through a variety of stormwater management practices. Ultimately, these requirements will likely apply to the entire Charles River watershed.

High levels of nutrients – especially phosphorus – have in the past several years have caused the Charles River and other waterbodies to turn a bright shade of blue-green during summertime algae blooms. The color is caused by blooms of cyanobacteria, which can be harmful to both people and pets.

"EPA's extension of the Clean Water Act to include polluted stormwater runoff from commercial and industrial parking lots is both bold, and necessary. We will never clean up urban rivers without cleaning up existing runoff from pavement. This bold move will aid cities and towns meet their requirements, and help restore a more natural balance to the way water works in metropolitan regions, not just in the Charles River, but ultimately across the United States," said Bob Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Association.

"It is time for existing commercial and industrial developments to do their fair share to clean up the stormwater pollution that is threatening public health and recreation in New England's waters," said Christopher Kilian, Director of the Conservation Law Foundation's Clean Water and Healthy Forests Program. "The EPA took this precedent-setting action because the Clean Water Act's mandates don't allow this pollution to go unaddressed."

In October 2007, EPA and the state began a process to limit phosphorus entering the Charles River by establishing a new "Total Maximum Daily Load" (TMDL) for discharges of phosphorus into the lower Charles River. A TMDL determines how much of a pollutant can be put into a body of water before it has harmful effects. Today's announced steps are the next phase of acting on the TMDL.

Since 1995, EPA's Clean Charles Initiative has featured coordinated efforts between EPA, state and local governments, private organizations, and environmental advocates. Cities and towns along the Charles have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in stormwater and sewer improvements. As a result, rapid progress has been achieved in the last decade in making the river safe for recreation, such as boating and, increasingly, swimming.

More information:

- EPA's efforts to [reduce nutrients from the Charles River](http://epa.gov/ne/charles/tmdl.html) (Residual Designation decision & Exec. Summary) (epa.gov/ne/charles/tmdl.html)
- [EPA's Charles River Initiative](http://epa.gov/region1/charles/index.html) (epa.gov/region1/charles/index.html)
- [Charles River TMDL to reduce phosphorus](http://epa.gov/region1/eco/tmdl/approved.html#ma) (epa.gov/region1/eco/tmdl/approved.html#ma)

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