

(July 6, 2007) Legislation Seeks Restrictions of Sewage Dumping into Lakes

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Suggesting that it's time to stop dumping sewage into our drinking water, legislators on Thursday announced a bipartisan bill to protect the Great Lakes from such pollution.

Touting the support of a lengthy list of environmental groups, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, and U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Western Springs, unveiled the Great Lakes Water Protection Act.

The act would increase public disclosure of sewage dumping incidents, redirect penalty fines for such incidents from the U.S. Treasury to wastewater treatment facilities and habitat and wetland projects, and eventually quadruple fines for the incidents.

"Each year, more than 24 billion gallons of sewage are dumped into the crown jewel of the Midwest, the Great Lakes," Kirk said. "We need to bring coastal cities in line with Chicago's water treatment reforms to ensure that we stop poisoning our water supply. By increasing penalties for dumping and creating a Great Lakes Clean-Up Fund, we can ensure the environmental health of our water resources for future generations."

Kirk said Detroit is the worst polluter, with more than 13 billion gallons of sewage dumped annually. Milwaukee is also high on the list with over 1 billion gallons dumped annually, a number that has in the recent past spiked as high as 4 billion gallons.

For the large cities, such incidents usually occur during or after large storms. Kirk said other cities should look to Chicago as a model, noting that efforts such as the Deep Tunnel project have effectively put an end to major sewage spills.

Kirk also noted that some remote and rural areas simply dump sewage in the lakes as a routine, and added that the bill would put an end to that.

Under the proposal, penalty fines for sewage dumping would be directed toward wastewater treatment projects and efforts to protect natural habitat and restore wetlands.

The fines would also be hiked from \$25,000 per violation to \$100,000 by 2027. Kirk said he hopes that a public outcry in response to the rate of sewage dumping in the Great Lakes will help him accelerate the deadline for the fine increase.

Kirk said his "dream" is that once the United States has halted the dumping of sewage into the Great Lakes, "then we can, with clean hands, turn to Canada and say 'now you do the same.'"

Kirk and Lipinski announced the legislation during National Clean Beaches Week, which concluded Thursday.

The proposal is endorsed by host of groups and agencies, including the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Audubon, the City of Chicago, the Great Lakes Aquatic Network and Fund, the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Wildlife Federation and the Natural Resources Defense Council.