



FOR THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT
February 23, 2018

**RB 5130 AAC The Sewage Spill Right-to-Know Act and
Expanding Continuing Education Programs for Wastewater Operators**

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

To: Sen. Ted Kennedy Jr., Sen. Craig Miner, Rep. Mike Demicco, Chairmen;
And Honorable Members of the Environment Committee:

Rivers Alliance strongly supports strengthening the sewage spill right-to-know law, but this bill scarcely touches the problems we have seen this year with sewage and industrial spills. I'll describe one of the disgusting episodes that occurred in the last 12 months. I'll then reference other serious spills and add recommendations on what needs to be done.

On October 9, a contractor working at the Waterbury sewage treatment plant inadvertently cut an electric line. **The plant lost power for five hours, and for every one of those five hours, a million gallons of sewage spilled into the Naugatuck River. In total, 5 million gallons of sewage was released into a river with near record low water levels at the time. So, almost 40 percent of the liquid in the river downstream of the plant was sewage.**

The public and press were not told of this mess for more than a week, although the odor and fish die-off were increasingly all too obvious. Here's a description of conditions from one of our members, Kevin Zak, founder of the Naugatuck River Revival Group.

As of 10/23/17 (14 days after the spill and 4 days after the public awareness), the presence of raw sewage within this small segment of river was still overwhelming. Football size sewage lay on rocks. Hundreds of dead fish exist within this corridor alone. On the rocks are signs of predators attempting to eat the fish and then aborting their meal. The visuals of sewage are overwhelming and heartbreaking.

*We have watched and warned fisherman attempting to fish this past Friday (almost 2 weeks after the spill) **while** sanitation workers from Waterbury attempted to pick up tampons and sewage in a losing battle.*

The workers were armed with gloves and litter-grab sticks, a few 5 gallon buckets and white kitchen plastic garbage bags. A few City employees worked from the Naugatuck Beardsley Ave pump station and headed north. While a few others worked from the sewage treatment plant south—approximately 6-8 workers in total wearing low yellow rubber boots and rubber gloves.

We have observed families attempting to go to the river to recreate. At the river's edge along Platts Mills Road Naugatuck, we interviewed a man that brings his dog to play catch with a tennis ball thrown into the river (almost every day as he has done for over 4 years). We learned he had been playing with his dog in the river every day after Oct 9th and was not warned.

Why was there so little redundancy at this treatment facility, so little emergency infrastructure, that a power outage caused this repellent, unhealthy situation?

Why were downstream towns, residents, and river users not adequately alerted?

Why were there no effective cleanup efforts?

Why did the state's Sewage-Right-to-Know site at DEEP not sound the alarm?

Why did not the Department of Public Health have people on the scene?

WHY DOES THIS KIND OF SPILL HAPPEN OVER AND OVER IN CONNECTICUT?

At this same plant, on October 29, there was another spill: 283,000 gallons, caused by another power outage (6 minutes) and more rain than the plant could manage. And earlier in the year, on April 16, other mishaps led to 580,000 gallons of sewage going down stream. On October 29 and 40, the Metropolitan Commission lost control of more than 90 million gallons that flowed into the three discharge systems of the Park River.

In the past year,, there were 384 sewage spills from 28 facilities, ranging from small spills to over 1 million gallons. Those million-gallons-plus spills occurred 35 times.

At this time, utilities are not by statute *required* to report spills electronically. The idea was not to burden small utilities that might not have the resources to do electronic reporting. But the MDC declines to do electronic reporting.

We recommend that all utilities be required to report spills electronically.

In our limited view, we have not seen stroking deficiencies in the training of operators, but it emergency response protocols are obviously inadequate.

We recommend that all utilities review and upgrade their emergency response plans. Does the utility have the capacity to deal with predictable emergencies, such as power loss or computer

hacking? Does the utility have the capacity and a protocol to alert its downstream neighbors of a contamination incident? It is not credible in this era of instant, global communication that utilities have no means of alerting the media, downstream officials, riverside residents, fishing groups, beach clubs, etc., that several thousand gallons of sewage (or worse) are flowing in the river.

We recommend that the sewage right-to-know law be extended to cover reporting of toxic industrial spills. A major industrial spill happened in the Naugatuck River last month. About 5,000 gallons of hydraulic fluid leaked into the river. The spill was reported late. The response and cleanup were inadequate. Oil covered the river. Fish died. .

Officials from the City of Waterbury have made a commitment to improve their emergency response plan. Perhaps they could offer useful suggestions. Rivers Alliance would be pleased to work with legislators who are interested in at least providing quick alerts when spills occur, while the state and utilities continue to try to make progress on spill prevention.

Thank you for your attention and patience.



Margaret Miner,
Executive Director 203-788-5161 rivers@riversalliance.org
Rivers Alliance of Connecticut
7 West St., Litchfield CT 06759