

Facing EPA lawsuit, Quincy says it spent at least \$30 million on sewers

Quincy spurred a massive cleanup effort in Boston Harbor and is now on the hook from federal regulators, who say it's responsible for polluting local waters today.

QUINCY — By almost any standard, the quality of the waters around Quincy has improved dramatically since the days when gallons upon gallons of raw sewage was discharged daily into Boston Harbor from an overburdened treatment plant at Nut Island.

It was Quincy that led the charge to stop the sewage discharge in the mid-1980s, suing the Metropolitan District Commission, which operated the plant, and other agencies over the outflow of untreated waste from the plant at the tip of Houghs Neck. The case eventually led to a court-ordered multibillion-dollar harbor cleanup and created the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

Despite the massive cleanup efforts, pollutants are still making their way into local waters, and federal environmental officials say Quincy has failed to do enough to stop the pollution. Last week, the U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts sued Quincy, alleging it violated the Clean Water Act numerous times between 2009 and 2013 by releasing sewage and untreated wastewater into Boston Harbor, Dorchester Bay, Quincy Bay and other public waterways.

If the city loses the case, it could mean hefty fines. The Clean Water Act provides for daily fines of \$37,500 for each violation that occurred on or before Nov. 2, 2015, and \$54,833 for each violation after that date. Federal officials want fines imposed.

City officials and lawmakers expressed outrage over the lawsuit, accusing federal prosecutors of ignoring the city's historic role in cleaning up the harbor as well as its ongoing efforts, which include more than \$30 million in spending on sewer repairs over the last 28 years. And that's despite not being eligible — because it already had separated sewer and storm drain systems — for the \$180 million set aside for municipal sewer upgrades in the harbor cleanup lawsuit that Quincy helped win.

"Quincy got the raw end of the deal," said Bruce Berman, a spokesman for Save the Harbor/Save the Bay of Boston.

Despite missing out on settlement money, Quincy officials say the city has made strides in addressing water pollution since 1991.

Quincy owns 208 miles of sewer line, 8,482 manholes and six sewer pumping stations. The average age of the pipes carrying wastewater in Quincy is about 100 years old. Its stormwater drains are in similar condition. The age of the pipes leads to cracks and breaks that can leak untreated sewage, which finds its way into waterways. It's a problem Mayor Thomas Koch said Quincy has been working to correct for decades.

"We have made great progress during the last several decades on clean water for the people of our city, and I reiterate that we don't need any federal bureaucrat who doesn't answer to anybody like we do — to the people every couple of years — to tell us that we should clean our water. We are cleaning our water. It's an important issue to the people of this city. We're a coastal community."

Koch said he was surprised by the federal government's decision to abandon negotiations with Quincy and instead seek punitive measures. The Environmental Protection Agency had been working with Quincy since 2016 following water tests that revealed high levels of the bacteria *E. coli* and enterococcus.

"The city of Quincy has never dumped sewage into any of our waterways. Does some sewage find its way into the waterways from various sources from time to time? Yes, it happens, and we're trying to eliminate all of those times so it doesn't happen," Koch said.

A list of 37 sewer-improvement projects — completed over the last 28 years at a cost of more than \$30 million as part of an effort to improve water quality at Wollaston Beach — represents just a portion of the money Quincy has invested in recent decades to clean up its waters. Since at least 2009, the city has spent \$3 million to \$5 million per year on repairing sewers and at least \$1 million a year on repairing stormwater drain systems, Koch said.



A man walks along the edge of Quincy Bay in Adams as a boat sits high and dry on Tuesday, June 27, 2017 (Gregg Derr/ Patriot Ledger)

Exact cost amounts for the projects weren't available Tuesday.

"There's been an ongoing effort in these last couple decades to make these repairs," Koch told city councilors Monday.

The scope of that work in the past few fiscal years includes a total replacement of about 18 miles of sewer lines in the area of Bayside Beach in Squantum and repairs, lining replacement and other improvements at at least 13 other locations. More improvements are in the works after Quincy this year won more than \$8 million in low-interest state loans.

"All of the problems that Quincy is trying to resolve are very expensive and complicated and time consuming and expensive and disruptive," Berman of Save the Harbor/Save the Bay said.

He said a balance needs to be struck between the federal government's responsibility to protect the public's right to clean water and a municipality's ability to pay.

Koch was adamant that federal officials are off-base on the issue.

"I don't need the EPA to tell me that we need clean waters in Quincy," Koch told city councilors at a meeting this week. "I think we all believe that, and I believe we have all been working toward that for the past few decades ... with tens of millions of dollars of improvements to our old infrastructure."