

Backgrounder: Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent

Municipal wastewater effluent is one of the largest sources of pollution, by volume, discharged to surface water bodies in Canada. Reducing the discharge of pollution through wastewater effluents requires a number of interventions ranging from source control to end-of-pipe measures. Wastewater effluents are currently managed through a variety of policies, by-laws and legislation at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels. The *Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent* will institute a harmonized approach to managing discharges from more than 3,500 wastewater facilities in Canada, and establish a one-window approach to governance so operators and facility owners deal with a single regulatory agency.

In November 2003, Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) agreed to develop a Canada-wide strategy to manage wastewater effluent. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have worked in partnership and in consultation with stakeholders to ensure that wastewater effluents do not pose unacceptable risks to human health and the environment.

The resulting strategy provides a path to regulatory clarity in managing wastewater effluents under a harmonized regulatory framework. The Strategy focuses on two outcomes:

1. improved human health and environmental protection; and
2. improved clarity on the management and regulation of wastewater effluents.

The Strategy includes minimum national performance standards to be achieved by all facilities and a process to develop and manage site-specific effluent discharge objectives. The minimum standards are equivalent to secondary treatment. The Strategy also outlines risk management activities to reduce the risks associated with combined and sanitary sewer overflows. High-risk facilities must meet national performance standards within 10 years; low risk facilities will have up to 30 years to comply.

It is expected that jurisdictions will incorporate the key elements of the Strategy into their respective regulatory frameworks and create a one-window approach for regulatory clarity. Agreements will be negotiated between the federal government and provincial governments, and between the Government of Canada and the Yukon government. The federal government will also negotiate agreements with the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, taking into account the respective roles of all governments as well as the regulatory bodies.

The cost of implementing the Strategy over 30 years is at least \$10-\$13 billion, including capital and non-capital costs. About half of the costs will be expended

in the first 10 years of implementation, primarily to address high-risk facilities. The initial cost estimates do not include all costs associated with implementing the Strategy, in particular those costs associated with managing combined sewer overflows and meeting site-specific effluent discharge objectives.

The Strategy's economic plan includes a number of funding principles intended to assist jurisdictions improve the way wastewater effluents are managed. It also spells out several funding options, including:

- full cost recovery,
- federal infrastructure funding in partnership with provinces and municipalities
- public private partnerships
- strategic budget allocations
- debt financing

It may be challenging for many small and very small communities to implement the Strategy. Because of their limited fiscal capacity, they may have to look at flexible implementation options.

CCME will regularly assess progress on implementation of the Strategy. A coordinating committee under CCME will monitor implementation with a focus on continuous improvement. Progress towards meeting the requirements of the Strategy will be reported to CCME Ministers and Canadians every five years.

[Canada-wide Strategy for the Management of Municipal Wastewater Effluent](#)