



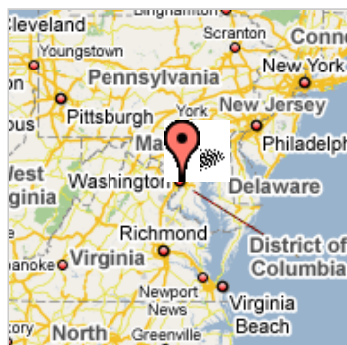
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EPA faulted on waterway pollution from sprawl

By DINA CAPIELLO – 5 days ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency is failing to stem the pollution washing into waterways from cities and suburbs, the National Academy of Sciences reported Wednesday.

The report's authors urged "radical changes" in how the federal government regulates stormwater runoff so that all waters are clean enough for fishing and swimming.

"The take-home message is the program as it has been implemented in the last 18 to 20 years has largely been a failure," said Xavier Swamikannu, one of the authors and the head of Los Angeles' stormwater program for the California Environmental Protection Agency.

Stormwater runoff is the toxic brew of oil, fertilizers and trash picked up by rain and snowmelt as the water flows over parking lots, roofs and subdivisions.

The report said responsibility for managing stormwater must shift from developers to local governments, and permits should be issued on the boundaries of a watershed, rather than state borders. Such a change probably would require a new law and take between five years to 10 years, the report said.

While urban areas cover only 3 percent of the U.S., it is estimated that their runoff is the primary source of pollution in 13 percent of rivers, 18 percent of lakes and 32 percent of estuaries.

Current law is ill-equipped to deal with the problem, the authors said.

Congress required the EPA in 1987 to start issuing permits under the Clean Water Act to industrial and construction sites. But lawmakers changed the focus on water pollution, from industrial discharges and sewage pipes to runoff, a problem that is much larger and harder to pinpoint.

The law is designed to target specific contaminants, when the problem with stormwater often is one of volume. A surge of water after a storm can cause streams to erode and fill waterways with sediment.

Benjamin H. Grumbles, the EPA's assistant administrator for water, said the findings underscored the approaches the EPA is taking. The agency requested the review in 2006, but Grumbles disagreed on Wednesday with the conclusion that the stormwater program was failing.

"We want to accelerate the progress on reducing pollution and managing stormwater. We believe sound science, pollution prevention, and watershed protection will ensure continued clean water progress," he said.

The National Academy of Sciences is a private organization chartered by Congress to advise the government of scientific matters.

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