

HRSD agrees to \$900k fine

By Cory Nealon 247-4760

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - — The **Hampton Roads** Sanitation District agreed to pay a \$900,000 fine for discharging untreated sewage into the **Chesapeake Bay** and Atlantic Ocean.

The settlement, announced Tuesday by the **U.S. Department of Justice**, is part of a pending order that will force the Virginia Beach-based company to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into public sewer systems throughout the region.

Federal environment officials lauded the action as a crucial step toward enforcing the Clean Water Act, as well as restoring the health of the **Chesapeake**.

"Today's settlement represents **EPA's** continuing commitment to protect and restore the health of the Chesapeake Bay," said Cynthia Giles, assistant administrator of EPA's office of compliance and assurance.

A representative of the company countered that the agency is piggybacking on an agreement reached years ago with the state Department of Environmental Quality. Ted Henifin, general manager of HRSD, said the fine is EPA's way of "reaching into the pockets of Hampton Roads' citizens."

HRSD, which serves 1.6 million people throughout the region, including the Middle Peninsula, the Peninsula and South Hampton Roads, is conducting a \$100 million study of its sewage collection systems. Additionally, it plans to begin \$140 million worth of upgrades next year.

To help pay for the work, it has raised customer rates the past three consecutive years. Its fiscal 2010 budget, still under review, includes an 11 percent increase, Henifin said. According to the EPA release, HRSD allegedly discharged 9 million gallons of untreated sewage into area waterways since 2003. The overflows, which occurred at least 249 times, typically occur during heavy rainfall, or when pipes are blocked or break.

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