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Sanitation District to pay \$900,000 penalty

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The Hampton Roads Sanitation District has agreed to pay a \$900,000 civil penalty after overflows from its collection system and nine sewage treatment plants polluted the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries .

Under a settlement filed Tuesday in federal court, the Sanitation District is also required to collect data, conduct computer modeling and – in conjunction with the municipalities it serves – develop a regional plan to ensure that its sewer system has adequate capacity to handle flows from severe storms and prevent sewage overflows.

The Sanitation District must implement the regional plan, which is expected to cost millions of dollars, according to a news release from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The settlement comes after the United States and Virginia filed a joint complaint alleging that the Hampton Roads Sanitation District illegally discharged 9 million gallons of untreated sewage and other wastes from its sewer system and sewage treatment plants into various bodies of water, including the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean, on at least 249 occasions beginning in 2003.

The complaint also alleged the Sanitation District caused or contributed to at least 118 municipal sewer overflows when the sewer system exceeded its capacity. The volume lost by the municipalities is unknown but is believed to be substantial, the news release said.

A copy of the consent decree is subject to a 30-day public comment period and approval by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.

Major upgrades and improvements required for the sewer system over the next eight years are expected to cost at least \$140 million, and the settlement requires the Sanitation District to evaluate, replace, rehabilitate or upgrade pipes, pump stations and other infrastructure where inspections and screenings show a material risk of failure. A new plan to manage, operate and maintain the system is also required to prevent future sanitary sewer overflows.

The Hampton Roads Sanitation District serves 1.6 million customers in 17 counties and cities, according to its Web site. The system consists of 104 pump stations, nine major Hampton Roads plants, four smaller plants on the Middle Peninsula and more than 500 miles of pipes for a combined capacity of 231 million gallons per day.