



Summer Report

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Beach closings throughout the Great Lakes

It's time for the EPA to act to cut sewage pollution

Summertime wouldn't be complete without the beach, whether it's a weekend trip to the Upper Peninsula, or a day on the shore of Lake Michigan. Unfortunately, in recent years, beach closings have become all too familiar all around the Great Lakes.

The people who rely on Lake Michigan and the other Lakes for their drinking water and summertime recreation, as well as the wildlife who call it home, are threatened by the billions of gallons of sewage pollution that pour into them every year. This summer, we're calling on the Environmental Protection Agency to update its standards to curb the pollution that causes sewage overflows and otherwise makes our beaches unswimmable.

When it rains, sewage pours

Stormwater is a leading source of water pollution nationwide. And what's more, heavy rains can overwhelm cities' sewage systems, causing raw sewage to flow into waterways without ever being treated.

In this manner, 24 billion gallons of sewage make their way into the Great Lakes every year. During the summer, beaches up and down our state's hundreds of miles of shoreline are flagged for bacteria levels above state standards, and swimmers are told to stay away. Elevated bacteria levels have prompted hundreds of beach closings on Michigan's shores every year since 2005.



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▲ Empire Beach at Sleeping Bear Dunes, Lake Michigan.

Stopping sewage pollution

The EPA is working to update its rules to cut the sewage pollution that threatens the Great Lakes, and is scheduled to announce the rules in the fall. But polluters and their allies in Congress are trying to prevent the EPA from doing its job. That's why we're working this summer to build the public support necessary to show EPA Admin-

istrator Lisa Jackson and other officials that Michiganders want them to protect the Great Lakes, so we don't have to stay away from them when it rains and the threat of pollution is too high. Our citizen outreach staff will be meeting with tens of thousands of people statewide, collecting petition signatures.



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◀ [Lake Superior.](#)

Links to additional content are posted on our website:

www.EnvironmentMichigan.org



To our members

For millions of Michiganders, summer means spending time on the water—whether it's spending the day climbing up and down the hills at Sleeping Bear Dunes, or a weekend on Lake Michigan.

All of the Great Lakes are cleaner today than they once were, thanks in large part to the Clean Water Act and other rules set by state and federal environmental officials. Unfortunately, despite the progress, too many of our precious waterways are still not clean enough—hundreds of our beaches end up closed every summer because pollution makes them unsafe for swimming.

As we work to strengthen our laws and ensure that all of Michigan's and America's waterways are safe for swimming and fishing, polluters are filing lawsuits and pushing some in Congress to block the EPA from doing its job. I hope you'll join us this summer in showing your support for clean water.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Regional Program Director

Recent action

2010 was breakthrough year for solar

In an otherwise lackluster economy the solar industry shined brighter than ever before in 2010, with a 67 percent increase in the amount of solar energy projects installed across America compared to 2009.

That means more homes and businesses powered by pollution-free solar energy, an increase made possible by strong solar policies implemented at the urging of Environment Michigan. In December, federal Clean Energy Advocate Sean Garren led our charge in Congress to extend critical incentives for solar power.

Environment Michigan, along with the rest of the Environment America federation, continues to strategize with entrepreneurs within the solar industry to hit a far more ambitious benchmark: getting 10 percent of our nation's energy from solar by 2030.

President pushes for conservation funding

Margie Alt, the director of our national federation, joined President Obama at the White House in February for his announcement that he'd seek the renewal of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

What's the Land and Water Conservation Fund? For the past 45 years the federal government has put a fraction of the revenue from offshore drilling into a trust fund to expand national parks, protect hunting and fishing areas, and aid local conservation and recreation projects like city parks and playing fields.

In 2010, the Land and Water Conservation Fund spent money protecting important natural places in Michigan including Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Ottawa National Forest.

Our staff is currently building support for the approval of this conservation funding in Congress.

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▲ Lake Michigan.

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For a healthy future, update the Clean Air Act

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There's no doubt that the Clean Air Act, which turned 40 in 2010, has improved the health and well-being of millions of Americans. Its protections are credited with saving the lives of 160,000 Americans in 2010 alone.

Of course, air pollution remains a pressing health threat in this country, a stark reminder of the work still left to do. 13,200 Americans lost their lives as a result of heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks and other fatal conditions brought on or exacerbated by air pollution from power plants. It's estimated that one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her bloodstream (a byproduct of coal power production) to put her child at risk should she become pregnant.

Thankfully, the Obama administration has announced it will seek to strengthen and update portions of the Clean Air Act in the coming months.

An assault on our health

With some vocal opponents of the Clean Air Act throwing their weight around in Congress, Environment Michigan, along with our national federation Environment America, the American Lung Association and other public health organizations are building support to make sure the administration's proposals go through.

In January, Environment Michigan State Associate Nicole Lowen released a hard-hitting examination of one of the most dangerous air pollutants: mercury. That report, "Dirty Energy's Assault on our Health," documented waterways that carry advisories warning against fish consumption due to mercury pollution, including the Great Lakes. According to the report, power plants in Michigan emitted 4,012 pounds of mercury pollution in 2009.

A taste of things to come?

The Obama administration's updates to Clean Air Act face great uncertainty, with polluting industries and their allies in Congress having launched an all-out assault on the Clean Air Act.

In February, the House of Representatives attached a provision to a federal funding bill that would have blocked the EPA from cutting mercury pollution from cement plants, cleaning up soot pollution, and reducing carbon dioxide from coal-fired plants.

Less than a month later, the Senate rejected the funding bill, with many senators citing the environmental and public health attacks within the bill as one of the reasons for their opposition.

Yet, with some members of Congress still trying to block the EPA from doing its job in protecting our air, Environment Michigan is continuing to work for clean air and a healthier future.



report 

**Dirty Energy's Assault on our
Health: Mercury**

To read the full report visit:
www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/reports

Is nuclear power worth the risk?

Our hearts go out to the people of Japan who, after seeing a massive earthquake and tsunami strike their country, were forced to contend with an escalating nuclear crisis.

At press time, the consequences were still unfolding: Drinking water samples in Tokyo were contaminated with radioactive iodine at a level dangerous to infants; the sale of a dozen types of produce from the Fukushima region were banned due to potentially dangerous levels of radioactivity; hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated from the area around the reactors; and high radiation levels were found in the nearby ocean waters.

Should we be concerned about America's 104 nuclear plants, especially the Enrico Fermi plant in Frenchtown Township, posing similar risks to our children's health and our environment? Based on our analysis, yes. At its most basic level, Mother Nature proved stronger than the best safeguards that Japan could design. Why would we be different?

Environment Michigan is urging the Obama administration and others to improve the safety of existing nuclear plants, declare a moratorium on new plants, and begin to responsibly phase out our use of nuclear power in favor of clean, renewable energy, like wind and solar power.

▲ Enrico Fermi Nuclear
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Frenchtown Township.

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Environment Michigan

Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Michigan. We focus exclusively on protecting Michigan's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Taking on Big Ag's pollution

Environment Michigan joined local farmers and fishermen to release a report that details why big agribusiness remains one of the most stubborn roadblocks in the fight for clean water.

The report, "Corporate Agribusiness and America's Waterways," analyzes the effects of the Midwest's dramatic shift to factory farming, particularly how this change is polluting local waterways across the region. Nationwide, agribusiness contributes to making 100,000 miles of rivers and 2,500 square miles of inland lakes too polluted for swimming, fishing, drinking and wildlife habitat—and is likely contributing to the re-emergence of the dead zone in Lake Erie.

Environment Michigan used the report's findings to call on the Environmental Protection Agency and the state of Michigan to make sure that agribusiness companies stop polluting our waters, and require that they take responsibility when they do.



Rudy Umans, Shutterstock

Large, factory-style dairy operations such as Vreba-Hoff consistently run afoul of environmental regulations, posing a threat to waters throughout the Midwest.

Read the whole report online at www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/reports