

COMBINED SEWER SYSTEM NOTICES

**House Bills 4045-4047 as passed
by the House
Second Analysis (9-12-97)**

**Sponsor: Rep. William Callahan
Committee: Conservation, Environment
and Recreation**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The problem of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) poses a threat to the state's many bodies of fresh water, including the Great Lakes. Combined sewer systems are those that carry both municipal waste and storm water in a single conduit, or pipe, to a wastewater treatment facility. The pollution problem occurs frequently in areas of the state -- primarily large urban centers -- that lack sewer systems able to handle both storm water and wastewater safely. When heavy rain or melted snow fills these systems to capacity, the storm water "combines" with the sanitary sewage in the pipes, and, if the combined volumes of storm water and sanitary sewage exceed the capacity of the municipal treatment plant, the excess volume is diverted away from the plant and "overflows" untreated and is discharged into lakes and streams. Along with raw sewage, CSOs dump pesticides, fertilizers, oil and grease, and untreated toxic substances into Michigan waters. Michigan's environmental laws underwent revision in 1993 to provide funds to communities that needed to upgrade their combined sewer systems, and to allow villages to issue bonds for CSO abatement facilities. In addition, to protect the public health, municipalities in which CSOs occur were required to take steps to inform the state, the public, and affected communities of a discharge and to be responsible for necessary testing. Some problems with CSOs persist, however. Specifically, these problems involve proper notification of affected downstream areas by a municipality that is discharging untreated sewage from a combined sewer system; and discharges from downspouts into sanitary sewage systems.

Under the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), a municipality must notify the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), newspapers, and affected (downstream) municipalities, when it discharges untreated sewage from a combined sewer system (CSS). Untreated sewage is sewage that has not received any treatment, such as screening to remove large objects, settling to remove particles that are heavier than water, skimming to remove floating

scums and foams, being subjected to microbial processes to

