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# D.C. Breaks Ground On \$2.6 Billion Sewage Tunnel

By: Jessica Gould // October 12, 2011

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Courtesy of: Jessica Gould

D.C. is putting \$2.6 billion into the construction of a new sewage tunnel that would reduce overflow in the District by 96 percent.

The District is kicking off its largest construction project since the building of Metro, but it's not moving people, it's moving waste. The \$2.6 billion project seeks to reduce sewage overflow into the Anacostia River, Potomac River and Rock Creek by as much as 96 percent by installing an enormous underground tunnel to treat wastewater.

The current system, called a combined sewer, dumps 2.5 billion gallons into area waterways every year, combining rain with sewage overflow. This creates problems for humans as much as other living organisms unfortunate enough to be living in area rivers.

"The sewer pipe has an intake that's stormwater right off the street," explains George Hawkins, the general manager of D.C. Water. "And sewage comes from a building. When that pipe fills, it allows overflow so that there's some space so that it doesn't come back into people's basements or back into the streets. That overflow now goes into the river."

So, several years ago, the federal government required D.C. Water to fix the problem. The project they broke ground on today is the size of a Metro tunnel, and allows the city to treat and cleanse the water before it is released into the Potomac and the Chesapeake.

The project is scheduled to be finished by 2025.

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