

**From:** Mears, David

**Sent:** Thursday, April 21, 2011 3:45 PM

**To:** MacLean, Alex; Markowitz, Deb; Recchia, Chris

**CC:** Johnson, Justin; Thompson, Christine; Kessler, Gary; LaFlamme, Pete

**Subject:** Burlington Sewage Spill Media Inquiries

Alex, Deb, Chris: I have received two media calls so far on the Burlington sewage treatment plant discharge of raw, untreated sewage, one from John Dillon at VPR and one from WCAX with Jennifer Reading reporting. I just completed the interviews with both and wanted to give you a heads up.

Background: Burlington's STP discharged about 2.5 million gallons of raw, untreated sewage. The cause of the discharge was operator error – a switch was inadvertently left off after routine maintenance and, as a result, the sewage was discharged without chlorine disinfection.

Key points I made (or tried to make) in the interviews:

- raw sewage discharges are a problem – a public health threat due to disease causing agents, and because of the pollutants in the sewage
- an enforcement response is a possibility but we need to gather more information before deciding on an appropriate action
- a violation caused by operator error is still a violation
- it is important for communities to maintain and properly staff and operate their sewage treatment plants
- federal funding for sewer and water infrastructure was just cut \$4M in the most recent federal budget
  
- John Dillon wanted to know if this spill represented a trend. I said I did not know but intended to review the data on raw sewage spills to see if there are any systemic failures that can be corrected in order to reduce the incidence of sewage spills
- John also asked if the changes to spill reporting made a few years back were working. I said that this incident reflects that the system is working – the public and DEC were promptly notified of the spill so that the public is aware of the health threat and DEC can quickly help to formulate the appropriate regulatory response

Please let me know if you have any questions.

David K. Mears, Commissioner

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation