

Information from WSSC Water

What is the Potomac Interceptor?

- The Potomac Interceptor (PI) is a 54-mile-long regional sanitary sewer pipeline with two river crossings and was constructed in the early 1960s by an Act of Congress.
- DC Water owns, operates and maintains this pipeline. DC Water is primarily overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which enforces federal drinking water and wastewater standards. Locally, the DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) monitors environmental impacts.
- The interceptor line, about 60 years old, carries about 60 million gallons of wastewater daily from a 376 square-mile service area, which includes: Loudoun and Fairfax counties, areas near Washington Dulles International Airport, Vienna, Herndon and portions of Montgomery County to DC Water's Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant.

What Happened?

- A section of the Potomac Interceptor collapsed on Monday, January 19, 2026, along Clara Barton Parkway and the I-495 interchange in Montgomery County causing a sanitary sewer overflow in the C&O Canal National Historical Park that entered the Potomac River.
- 194 million gallons overflowed before bypass pumps activated (first 5 days) and there have been approximately 243 million gallons total overflow since the incident began.
- This section carries wastewater from Loudoun and Fairfax counties in Virginia and parts of Montgomery County to DC Water's Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- DC Water mobilized to install a bypass pumping system to reroute wastewater flows around the collapsed section. The bypass was activated on January 24.

Is Drinking Water Safe?

- Yes. WSSC Water's drinking water is safe and is not affected by this incident. The drinking water we provide to most of our customers comes from the Potomac Water Filtration Plant in Potomac, Maryland, which is located well north of the collapsed pipe. Look at this video to see the distance. 
- WSSC Water continuously monitors water quality at our water filtration plants and will continue to monitor sampling data for the northernmost testing site monitored by Maryland Department of the Environment.

Is DC Water Performing Water Quality Testing of the Potomac River?

- DC Water and DOEE are performing water quality testing in the river, including around the overflow area as well as upstream and downstream sites.
- DC Water published the testing results on their Potomac Interceptor Collapse webpage. 

How is WSSC Water Involved?

- WSSC Water is the water and wastewater utility serving most of Montgomery and Prince George's counties.
- DC Water provides wastewater services to WSSC Water and our service area under a longstanding multi-jurisdictional agreement. Under this agreement, WSSC Water contributes to the costs associated with construction work on the Potomac Interceptor based on wastewater flow. That framework includes costs associated with emergency repairs.
- For this segment of the interceptor, WSSC Water's current cost share is 30.9 percent, with a portion of that share allocated to and paid for by the City of Rockville at 15.87 percent.
- Repair costs to the jurisdictions served by this pipeline should be reduced if DC Water receives federal funding for this emergency.

What's Next?

- DC Water estimates it will take several weeks to clear a blockage in the pipe and another nine months for permanent repairs.
- According to DC Water, they are developing an Environmental Restoration Plan in conjunction with federal, state and local regulators.



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