



Potomac Interceptor Status Report (June) and the Oversight failures at the Potomac Interceptor and Plan for Coordinated, Ongoing Water Quality Monitoring Report

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Maryland Department of the Environment

June 24, 2026

Executive Summary

On January 19, 2026, a section of the Potomac Interceptor (PI) sewer line—a 72-inch reinforced concrete pipe operated and maintained exclusively by the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water)—collapsed near the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal and the Clara Barton Parkway interchange with Interstate 495 in Montgomery County, Maryland. The collapse resulted in the release of an estimated 243 to 300 million gallons of untreated wastewater into the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the Potomac River.

This report is submitted by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) pursuant to the 2026 legislative session Joint Chairmen's Report. It provides a detailed analysis of the incident, a timeline of key events, a clear description of the roles and regulatory authority of MDE and other agencies, an assessment of the current understanding of the causes of the collapse, and a description of MDE's water quality monitoring efforts and future monitoring plan.

Key findings of this report include:

- The Potomac Interceptor is operated and maintained by DC Water. MDE has no role in permitting or inspecting the PI's infrastructure. The PI operates under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- MDE has broad and independent authority under Maryland law, and under its federal delegation to implement the federal Clean Water Act, to protect water quality, aquatic life, shellfish harvesting areas, and public health in Maryland waters, and has exercised that authority vigorously since the first day of this incident.
- Water quality sampling by MDE at multiple Potomac River locations has shown that bacteria levels generally returned to below applicable health standards by late February 2026, with localized precipitation-driven spikes continuing, as is expected and normal.
- MDE has partnered with the University of Maryland (UMD) to analyze sediment samples using advanced digital PCR (dPCR) technology. Results are largely unremarkable, with one location near the spill site showing elevated human fecal markers. Additional investigation is ongoing.
- MDE has directed DC Water to conduct ongoing water quality monitoring and to submit a comprehensive Remediation and Restoration Plan, which MDE will review and approve. MDE reserves all rights to pursue enforcement.
- The Office of the Attorney General, on behalf of MDE, filed a complaint in state court on April 21, based on unpermitted discharges of pollutants into Maryland Waters.

I. Background: The Potomac Interceptor

The Potomac Interceptor is a major sanitary sewer conveyance system that carries approximately 60 million gallons of wastewater per day from communities near Dulles International Airport in Virginia to DC Water's Potomac Pumping Station in Washington, D.C. From there, flows are conveyed to the Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant in Washington, D.C. for treatment prior to discharge into the Potomac River.

The PI was constructed pursuant to Public Law 86-515, enacted by the 86th Congress on June 12, 1960, which authorized the District of Columbia to plan, construct, operate, and maintain a

sanitary sewer connecting Dulles Airport to the District's sewer system. Construction began in 1961, with mainline service commencing in 1963. The system runs through Montgomery County and Prince George's County in Maryland before crossing into the District.

DC Water is an independent authority of the D.C. government established in 1996. Its Board of Directors includes representatives from the District of Columbia, Fairfax and Loudoun Counties in Virginia, and Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland. DC Water provides retail water and wastewater services to more than 500,000 customers in the District and conveys and treats wastewater for approximately 1.6 million customers in the broader regional service area, including customers in Maryland and Virginia who are served through local jurisdictions.

The failed pipe section was a 72-inch reinforced concrete pipe (RCP) located on National Park Service (NPS) property between the C&O Canal and the Clara Barton Parkway, east of I-495 in Montgomery County. The site is within the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

II. Jurisdictional Framework: Roles and Responsibilities

Understanding the regulatory responsibilities of the various parties is essential context for this report. The Potomac Interceptor operates across multiple jurisdictions and involves both federal and state regulatory authority. The following describes the roles of the primary parties.

DC Water

DC Water is the sole operator and maintainer of the Potomac Interceptor. DC Water is fully responsible for the repair, remediation, restoration, and ongoing monitoring costs associated with the January 19, 2026, failure and its impacts. DC Water is also responsible for the emergency bypass system it constructed in response to the collapse, the physical rehabilitation of the failed pipe section, and all site cleanup activities.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

EPA is the primary federal regulator of DC Water's operations. The Potomac Interceptor operates under an NPDES permit issued by EPA under the Clean Water Act. As part of the collection system for the Blue Plains wastewater treatment plant, EPA holds primary regulatory authority over the PI's operation, maintenance, and inspection. EPA also served as the lead federal response coordinator for this incident. MDE has no role in issuing permits for, or conducting inspections of, the Potomac Interceptor infrastructure, except for permits necessary for construction, including wetlands authorizations and stormwater management permits. Otherwise, that regulatory authority for the Potomac Interceptor rests exclusively with EPA.

Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)

Although MDE does not have permitting or inspection authority over the PI itself, MDE has broad and independent authority under Maryland law, as well as under federal Clean Water Act delegated authorities, to protect water quality, designated uses, aquatic life, shellfish harvesting areas, natural resources, and public health within Maryland waters. The discharges from the PI failure entered and significantly impacted Maryland waters, and MDE is exercising its full authority in response.

MDE's specific authorities and actions in this matter include:

- Regulating and providing enforcement oversight related to unauthorized discharges into Maryland waterways and wetlands under the Environment Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland;
- Overseeing drinking water safety and enforcement, though no public drinking water was impaired by this incident;
- Monitoring shellfish harvesting areas and issuing and lifting precautionary closures;
- Issuing a Notice of Referral to the Maryland Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to support legal action;
- Directing DC Water to submit a comprehensive remediation and restoration plan and reviewing and approving that plan;
- Requiring DC Water to obtain applicable Maryland permits for on-site remediation activities since these activities are subject to Maryland regulatory requirements, including erosion and sediment control, waterway construction, and wetland protection permits;
- Conducting independent water quality monitoring and partnering with academic institutions to assess environmental impacts;
- Coordinating public communication with DC Water, other state and federal partners, and community members, and hosting public listening sessions; and
- Issuing permits and providing oversight relevant to construction associated with the repair and rehabilitation of the interceptor, consistent with normal construction permitting requirements.

Maryland Department of Health and County Health Departments

State and county health departments are responsible for making public health determinations and issuing recreational contact advisories for affected water bodies. Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Charles County health departments, in coordination with the DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), issued and subsequently lifted recreational contact advisories based on water quality data from MDE and DC Water sampling programs. As of the delivery of this report, Montgomery County Health Department maintains a narrow advisory for contact with the shoreline in a specific area downstream of the spill site where MDE monitoring in April and May detected elevated levels of bacteria in bottom sediment, though not in the water column itself.

National Park Service (NPS)

NPS is the land manager for the C&O Canal National Historical Park, where the collapse occurred. NPS authorized DC Water's access to, and remediation activities on, NPS property pursuant to a Special Use Permit and has been closely involved in restoration planning for the canal and surrounding areas. NPS also is responsible for issuing permits for construction activity on its property related to the larger rehabilitation, including maintenance and repairs, of the PI.

III. Timeline of Key Events

The following table summarizes the key events from the initial collapse through May 2026.

Date	Event
January 19, 2026	72-inch reinforced concrete pipe (RCP) collapses downstream of Manhole 17, east of I-495 near the Clara Barton Parkway. An estimated 243 to 300 million gallons of untreated wastewater begins discharging into the C&O Canal and Potomac River. MDE staff begin field inspections within hours of notification.
January 20, 2026 onward	MDE conducts joint inspections with U.S. EPA, and coordinates with federal and local agencies, issuing corrective actions during emergency response.
January 24, 2026	DC Water, in coordination with the National Park Service (NPS), activates a controlled bypass using the C&O Canal, managing approximately 40 million gallons per day (MGD) and stopping the majority of uncontrolled overflow. Out of an abundance of caution, MDE issues a precautionary shellfish harvesting closure at the nearest shellfish harvesting on the Potomac (about 50 river miles downstream).
January 27, 2026	Bypass capacity increased to 60 MGD. County and DC health departments begin issuing recreational contact advisories for affected sections of the Potomac River.
February 8–9, 2026	Secondary overflows occur due to bypass pump blockages caused by flushable wipes and grease. DC Water responds rapidly to clear blockages. This is the last date on which overflow reaches the Potomac River.
February 12, 2026	MDE conducts initial shellfish sampling in area of precautionary closure, with results indicating no level of concern of monitored bacteria. Note: Efforts to sample prior to February 12 were hampered by frozen river conditions.
February 18, 2026	MDE sends formal correspondence to DC Water, and a Notice of Referral to the Maryland Office of the Attorney General.
March 2, 2026	DC Water and federal partners begin land-based cleanup and mitigation work at the spill site.
March 10, 2026	MDE lifts the precautionary shellfish harvesting closure based on comprehensive sampling data demonstrating bacteria levels below applicable standards.
March 12, 2026	MDE issues a formal letter to DC Water directing submission of a Comprehensive Remediation and Restoration Plan, assessing areas of the river beyond the immediate spill site, and setting out requirements for comprehensive impact characterization, restoration, and prevention of future overflows.
March 14, 2026	Emergency repairs completed; normal flow restored to the Potomac Interceptor. Work begins at the C&O Canal to remove sludge and impacted soil. DC Water and regional health agencies begin lifting recreational contact advisories. Montgomery County maintains a narrowed advisory in the immediate vicinity of the spill site.
March 26, 2026	DC Water submits initial response to MDE's March 12 letter, outlining progress on cleanup and identifying open questions regarding sediment sampling

Date	Event
	methodology. DC Water expresses reluctance to perform sediment testing, a key priority for MDE.
April 2 and 14, 2026	MDE collects sediment samples upstream and downstream of the bypass area. University of Maryland analyzes samples using digital PCR (dPCR) for human fecal markers (HF183), E. coli, and other indicators.
April 20, 2026	Maryland Attorney General, on behalf of MDE, files a complaint in state court.
April 23, 2026	Long-term rehabilitation of the failed sewer line begins with site preparation.
May 2026	Cleanup and rehabilitation of the C&O Canal section used for bypass ongoing. MDE water quality sampling continues on a weekly basis and sediment samples are collected again on May 14th. MDE hosts community stakeholder meeting.

IV. Known and Suspected Causes of the Collapse

A. Physical Cause

Based on information available to MDE as of the date of this report, DC Water's current engineering assessment indicates that the failure and, critically, the unprecedented scale of the resulting overflow, were caused by a combination of structural pipe failure and the presence of large boulders in the trench backfill surrounding the failed pipe section. While investigations by independent assessors commissioned by DC Water's board are ongoing, DC Water has indicated that a combination of the PI's age and the constant presence of corrosive sewer gasses may have contributed to thinning and weakening the integrity of the pipe's walls.

An approximately 13-foot vertical elevation drop exists between Manholes 16 and 17, immediately upstream of the failure point, over a horizontal distance of approximately 35 feet. This hydraulic condition, combined with the pipe's age (constructed in 1961–1963), the backfill composition, and the blockage, may have contributed to the severity of the event.

DC Water alleges that when the 72-inch RCP pipe failed downstream of Manhole 17, boulders placed on top of the pipe collapsed into the damaged interceptor, creating a blockage that prevented normal downstream flow. According to DC Water, this "boulder dam" dramatically amplified what might otherwise have been a manageable and much shorter-duration overflow event. DC Water claims that, without the boulder obstruction, the discharge would have been of significantly smaller volume and duration.

B. Root Cause Investigation: Ongoing Efforts

The root causes of the pipe failure—including what led to the structural failure of the 72-inch RCP, whether inspection and maintenance practices were adequate, and whether prior warning signs were present—remain under active investigation. DC Water has engaged an independent engineering team to conduct a comprehensive root cause analysis. That analysis will evaluate:

- Structural condition of the failed pipe section and adjacent segments;
- Geotechnical factors, including backfill composition and subsurface conditions;
- Hydraulic conditions at the failure location;
- Historical inspection records and maintenance history; and

- Whether prior inspection data provided warning of elevated risk.

DC Water has indicated that findings from this analysis will be compiled and made available. EPA, as the primary federal regulator of DC Water and holder of the PI's NPDES permit, is providing oversight of this investigation. MDE is not the lead agency for the root cause analysis but has requested, and expects to receive, all relevant information from DC Water and EPA as it becomes available.

MDE has separately directed DC Water to provide a detailed causal analysis of the PI failure and to describe the preventive steps it is taking to address identified risks along the entire PI alignment. MDE considers this information essential to evaluating whether any similar event could occur at other points where the PI passes through Maryland or could discharge pollutants to waters of the State.

C. Condition of the Potomac Interceptor in Maryland

Following the collapse, MDE formally requested from DC Water a comprehensive assessment of the structural integrity of the Potomac Interceptor along its entire alignment within Maryland, including identification of elevated-risk segments and any factors affecting the structural capacity of the system.

DC Water has since expanded and accelerated its inspection and condition assessment program for the PI. Using multi-sensor inspection (MSI), laser profiling, high-resolution closed-circuit television (CCTV), and field verification, DC Water is conducting a risk and vulnerability assessment of the full PI system. DC Water is also reviewing specific high-risk sites for vulnerability, such as the two locations where the PI goes under the Potomac River, making a break in those locations extremely difficult to quickly address. A revised Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) reflecting the findings of this assessment is to be submitted upon completion.

MDE will continue to monitor DC Water's progress on this assessment and expects full transparency regarding any areas of elevated risk and the near-term mitigation measures being implemented.

V. MDE's Water Quality Monitoring Program

MDE moved quickly to assess and monitor the impacts of the PI overflow on Maryland waters. This section describes the monitoring activities MDE has undertaken since the date of the incident.

A. Initial Response

MDE staff began field inspections within hours of receiving notification of the pipe collapse on January 19, 2026. MDE established contact with DC Water, EPA, NPS, and county health departments and began coordinating monitoring activities across agencies.

B. Water Column Sampling: Bacteria Indicators

MDE established a network of water quality sampling stations along the Potomac River in Maryland, from the vicinity of the spill site downstream to Charles County. Sampling stations are designated POT-1 through POT-8, spanning locations from Old Angler's Inn (upstream of the spill site, control site) to southwest of Nanjemoy Creek. Samples are collected and analyzed for *E. coli* and *Enterococcus*, the key bacterial indicators used under EPA's 2012 recreational water quality criteria. Under those criteria, *E. coli* concentrations above 410 MPN/100 mL and

Enterococcus concentrations above 130 MPN/100 mL indicate potential impairment of recreational uses.

A representative sample of locations where MDE has conducted weekly water quality sampling results from February through May 2026 are summarized in the table below. Note that elevated values in the early weeks post-spill (particularly at POT-5 near Little Falls) were consistent with the proximity to the overflow site and the ongoing bypass operations. Values generally fell below applicable standards by late February. Elevated readings on March 17 were associated with a precipitation event and reflect the known relationship between stormwater runoff and temporary bacteria spikes in the Potomac, a phenomenon that occurs regularly, independent of sewer overflows.

Date	POT-6Old Angler's Inn(E. coli)	POT-5Little Falls Area(E. coli)	POT-4Chain Bridge(E. coli)	POT-3National Harbor(Enterococcus / E. coli)	POT-2Ft. Washington(Enterococcus / E. coli)
2/17/2026	71	>2420 	613 	10 / 65	20 / 17
2/25/2026	46	88	48	110 / 111	110 / 91
3/3/2026	4	31	6	10 / 108	<10 / 9
3/10/2026	12	38	11	<10 / 31	20 / 20
3/17/2026	194	921 	261	—	—
3/24/2026	3	15	4	20 / 19	<10 / 17
3/31/2026	4	20	2	<10 / 15	<10 / 9
4/7/2026	12	63	6	20 / 105	<10 / 23
4/14/2026	14	21	6	—	—
4/22/2026	8	81	3	<10 / 7	<10 / 1
4/28/2026	9	25	6	<10 / 17	30 / 2
5/6/2026	6	11	16	—	—
5/14/2026	55	435 	21	—	—
5/21/2026	172	179	285	—	—
5/26/2026	461 	281	345	—	—

Note:  indicates values above EPA 2012 recreational water quality criteria thresholds (410 MPN/100 mL for E. coli; 130 MPN/100 mL for Enterococcus). Elevated readings on 3/17/2026 are associated with a precipitation event. "—" indicates no sample collected at that location on that date.

A more comprehensive database of water quality results, including daily results at these and additional locations, collected by MDE, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the DC Department of Energy and Environment, and DC Water is available at an aggregated website built in collaboration by the jurisdictions at <https://potomacinterceptor.dc.gov/>.

Taken together, this water column data shows that E. coli levels - a key indicator of water safety - largely returned to historical levels by late February 2026, consistent with the river's natural flushing capacity and the cessation of active overflow by February 8, 2026. Precipitation-driven spikes after that date are within the range of normal variability for the Potomac River and do not indicate ongoing PI-related contamination.

C. Sediment Sampling

In addition to water column monitoring, MDE determined that sediment sampling was necessary to evaluate potential longer-term impacts of the overflow event. While MDE initially requested sediment sampling from DC Water, MDE elected to expedite this process in response to community concerns and collected sediment samples on April 2nd, 14th, and May 14, 2026, at locations upstream and downstream of the bypass area in areas along the Potomac River that are frequently accessed by recreators.

MDE engaged the University of Maryland to analyze the sediment samples using digital Polymerase Chain Reaction (dPCR), an advanced molecular technique capable of detecting and quantifying very low concentrations of target genetic markers. Samples were analyzed for HF183—a genetic marker strongly associated with human fecal contamination—as well as *E. coli* and other microbial indicators. Results from sediment sampling were largely unremarkable, with most samples showing low levels of indicators or levels below detection (BD, in the below table) or below the limit of quantification (BQL).

However, two sampling locations at Minnie's Island, just downstream from the spill site and sampled on April 14th and May 14th, showed elevated levels of *E.coli* markers and HF183 levels, warranting additional investigation. MDE notes that currently no health-based standards exist for bacteria in sediment, and that there are no standardized methods for sampling of bacteria in sediment. MDE and UMD are working to interpret these findings in appropriate scientific context, and MDE is transitioning further sampling to DC Water and requiring them to conduct an investigation to determine whether the elevated readings at Minnie's Island are a residual signal from the spill or are a function of local hydrologic conditions.

Potomac River Sediment Results											
Date	POT-13 Above Washington Aqueduct	POT-6 Old Angler's Inn	POT-17 Carderock Area	POT-12 Lock #10	POT-15 Minnie Is. Channel	POT-16 Minnie Is. Canoe Landing	POT-14 Pier, West Sycamore	POT-11 Sycamore Island	POT-5 Little Falls Area	POT-10 Lock 6, Kayak Input	POT-9 Lock 6, Kayak Takeout
HF183 (DNA copies/g)											
4/2/2026	BD	BD		BD				384	443	BD	BD
4/14/2026	BQL	BD	BD	BD	12,710	6,786	24	BD	BD	BD	BD
5/14/2026	BD	BD	BQL	BD	984	15	BD	BD	BD	BD	BD
<i>E. coli</i> (DNA copies/g)											
4/2/2026	BD	BQL		BD				96	193	BD	96
4/14/2026	BQL	11	24	BQL	2,019	1,643	27	BD	BQL	BQL	BQL
5/14/2026	BD	BD	BD	BD	764	68	BD	BD	BD	BD	BQL
<i>Enterococcus spp.</i> (thousand DNA copies/g)											
4/2/2026	0	52		0				123	1,501	0	115
4/14/2026	22	428	364	6	14,660	24,000	439	9	421	3	1
5/14/2026	62	30	BQL	607	5,466	31	2	23	12	28	6
<i>Bacteroides spp.</i> (thousand DNA copies/g)											
4/2/2026	5	31,010		1				363	73,080	0	2,540
4/14/2026	693	2,314	9,703	133	260,400	141,500	5,239	158	712	57	112
5/14/2026	4,003	3,393	5	53,740	686,400	27,030	365	1,093	423	5,462	3,590

Note: Since these parameters do not have established sediment sampling methods or risk thresholds, they are used in conjunction with other information to help identify potential risks. In some cases, these parameters can regrow in sediments or have elevated levels due to sources that are not specific to sewage.

MDE also sampled water quality at each time and location where it sampled sediment. MDE found no elevated levels of bacteria in the water column, nor did it find a correlation between elevated sediment bacteria levels at Minnie's island and bacteria in the water column at those sampling sites.

D. Shellfish Monitoring

MDE issued a precautionary shellfish harvesting closure for the affected reach of the Potomac River on January 24, 2026, consistent with MDE's standard protocols for sanitary sewer overflow events of this magnitude. The closure was lifted on March 10, 2026, based on comprehensive water quality sampling data demonstrating that bacteria levels were below applicable shellfish standards. MDE's routine shellfish monitoring program in this area continues.

E. Drinking Water

MDE coordinated with affected drinking water utilities throughout the incident. All water utilities confirmed that their treatment plants continued to produce safe drinking water throughout the event, with no contamination of treated water supplies detected. Notably, the spill occurred downstream from the primary water intakes used by WSSC Water and the Washington Aqueduct, which together provide drinking water across Montgomery County, Prince George's County, the District of Columbia, and parts of Northern Virginia. The spill occurred upstream of one secondary intake operated by the Washington Aqueduct (which provides water to DC and Northern Virginia) at Little Falls, but that intake has not been used. MDE will continue to monitor this issue.

F. Aquatic Life and Ecological Monitoring

No observable impacts to fish, wildlife, or other aquatic organisms were documented at the time of the overflow event. Dissolved oxygen levels at the Little Falls Pump Station, approximately two miles downstream of the overflow site, remained within normal ranges throughout the event, consistent with the high river flows at the time, which diluted the overflow's impact on oxygen levels.

MDE, in coordination with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and university partners, is monitoring for early indicators of algal blooms and other ecological responses that could develop over the coming months as nutrient loading effects manifest. MDE has directed DC Water to evaluate and report on long-term ecological impacts as part of the Remediation and Restoration Plan review process.

VI. Plan for Ongoing and Coordinated Water Quality Monitoring

MDE is committed to ensuring that water quality monitoring in the affected reach of the Potomac River is comprehensive, ongoing, transparent, and coordinated across all available data sources. The following describes the elements of MDE's monitoring plan going forward.

A. Continued MDE Water Column Sampling

MDE will continue regular water column sampling at its established POT station network until sampling results demonstrate consistent attainment of applicable water quality standards, and to verify DC Water's ongoing monitoring. MDE is working to ensure that DC Water maintains frequent sampling following significant precipitation events, which are known to cause transient bacteria spikes at locations along the river.

B. DC Water Monitoring Requirements

MDE has directed DC Water to conduct comprehensive, ongoing water quality monitoring as a condition of the Remediation and Restoration Plan that DC Water is required to submit to and obtain approval from MDE. This plan will specify parameters, sampling locations, frequency, analytical methods, reporting timelines, and performance criteria for determining when monitoring may be reduced or concluded. DC Water's monitoring obligations will include both water column and sediment parameters, as well as ecological assessments to evaluate benthic community recovery and other indicators of long-term aquatic ecosystem health.

C. University of Maryland Partnership

MDE will continue its partnership with the University of Maryland, including the use of dPCR technology for sediment analysis. This academic partnership provides access to advanced analytical capabilities not routinely available through commercial laboratories. MDE will also explore coordination with the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) and other academic institutions with expertise in Potomac River ecology and water quality.

D. Coordination with Other Data Sources

MDE recognizes the value of integrating data from multiple independent sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the PI overflow's impacts. MDE will coordinate with and leverage data from:

- The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB), which operates a network of water quality monitoring stations on the Potomac River;
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring stations providing continuous flow, temperature, and other parameters;
- Nonprofit watershed organizations operating established monitoring programs in the Maryland waters of the Potomac River, including organizations with demonstrated expertise in water quality monitoring and aquatic ecosystem assessment;
- DC Water's own extensive water quality monitoring program, which has been sampling daily at numerous locations since the incident; and
- Regional agencies including DOEE and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), which are conducting their own monitoring in adjacent jurisdictions.

MDE makes its own monitoring data publicly available on a regular basis on its website at: <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/water/Compliance/Pages/Potomac-Interceptor-Sewer-Overflow.aspx>. MDE will ensure that all relevant monitoring data inform decisions regarding the remediation and restoration process.

E. Long-Term Verification Monitoring

As part of the Remediation and Restoration Plan review and approval process, MDE will require DC Water to implement a long-term verification monitoring program with clearly defined performance standards and success criteria. This program will specify the conditions under which monitoring may be reduced, modified, or concluded, and will include reporting obligations to MDE at regular intervals. The duration and scope of long-term monitoring will be commensurate with the scale of the discharge event and the potential for long-term ecological impacts.

VII. Bypass System Status and Potential Maryland Costs

A. Bypass System

Following the initial pipe failure, DC Water constructed a bypass pumping system that routed interceptor flow through the C&O Canal and around the damaged pipe section, effectively stopping active overflow to the Potomac River by February 8, 2026. Emergency repairs to the failed section were completed on March 14, 2026, restoring normal flow to the PI. Long-term rehabilitation of the affected section commenced on April 23, 2026. The C&O Canal sections used for bypass operations are currently undergoing cleanup and restoration, with substantial completion of Phase I activities anticipated by July 2026 and final plantings expected in fall 2026.

DC Water has committed to full rehabilitation of the PI and has begun accelerated assessment of the entire alignment to identify and address elevated-risk segments. A revised CIP will be submitted following completion of the risk and vulnerability assessment.

B. Potential Maryland Ratepayer and Cost Impacts

The PI collects wastewater from areas of Montgomery County and Prince George's County, Maryland, which are served by the Washington Sanitary Sewer Commission (WSSC). Costs associated with the operation, maintenance, and repair of the Interceptor are governed by an Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) between DC Water, WSSC, and Virginia users of the system. Maryland ratepayers are responsible for 30.9% of Interceptor costs. Any future rate adjustments by DC Water to recover costs associated with the PI failure and rehabilitation would potentially affect WSSC ratepayers. MDE will include updates on potential ratepayer impacts in its monthly status reports to the General Assembly as they become available.

MDE is monitoring potential costs to Maryland ratepayers associated with this incident. The costs of emergency response, cleanup, remediation, restoration, and ongoing monitoring are accrued by DC Water but would normally be passed on to system users per terms of the IMA. At the time of writing of this report, DC Water estimates emergency response and repair costs in excess of \$20 million and restoration and monitoring costs in excess of \$10 million. DC Water estimates the cost of permanent rehabilitation of the 2700-foot section of the PI around the spill at \$30 million, which was already included in DC Water's CIP. The Mayor of Washington, DC has submitted a major disaster declaration request to FEMA; DC, and DC Water, are eligible to receive up to 75% reimbursement of approved costs associated with the disaster. MDE has formally notified DC Water that it expects any federal disaster assistance received to be used entirely to offset the costs of repair and restoration related to the January 19 incident, which would reduce the burden on Maryland ratepayers.

MDE has also incurred staff time and resources in connection with this incident, including for field inspections, water quality monitoring, regulatory review, coordination, and public engagement. UMD has incurred sampling costs as well. MDE will track and report these costs separately and will seek appropriate cost recovery from DC Water to the extent provided by applicable law.

VIII. Conclusion and Commitment to Ongoing Oversight

The January 19, 2026, collapse of the Potomac Interceptor was an unprecedented sanitary sewer overflow event with significant immediate and potential long-term impacts on Maryland waters, natural resources, and the communities that depend on them. MDE has responded with the full range of its legal authorities, exercised daily since the first hours of the incident.

While MDE does not hold permitting or inspection authority over the Potomac Interceptor infrastructure—which is the responsibility of DC Water and EPA—MDE's mandate to protect Maryland waters is clear, broad, and non-negotiable. MDE will continue to exercise that mandate through rigorous monitoring, transparent public reporting, and strong oversight of DC Water's remediation and restoration obligations.

MDE will submit monthly status reports to the General Assembly as requested, covering: water quality monitoring results from all available sources; updates on DC Water's remediation and restoration activities; updates on the independent root cause investigation; information regarding potential Maryland ratepayer and cost impacts; and updates on the bypass and rehabilitation status.

MDE also commits to continued partnership with the University of Maryland and other academic and scientific institutions to ensure that the environmental impacts of this incident are fully characterized, and that restoration efforts are grounded in the best available science.

MDE reserves all rights to pursue enforcement action against DC Water as warranted by the circumstances, and will continue to ensure that the full costs of this event are borne by DC Water.

Appendix A: Participating Agencies and Coordination Roles

The following agencies have been involved in the response to the Potomac Interceptor failure:

- DC Water – Operator and maintainer of the PI; responsible for emergency response, bypass operations, cleanup, remediation, and rehabilitation.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Primary federal regulator; NPDES permit holder; lead federal response coordinator; participant in soil and sediment sampling.
- National Park Service (NPS) – Land manager for C&O Canal National Historical Park; authorized DC Water's access to NPS property; participant in restoration planning.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – Provided technical assistance and field support for cleanup activities in Areas 1, 2, and 3.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – Engaged in connection with federal disaster assistance considerations.
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) – Lead Maryland regulator; water quality monitoring; regulatory oversight; shellfish closures; erosion and sediment control permits.
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Coordination on ecological monitoring, including potential algal bloom and aquatic life impacts.
- Maryland Office of the Attorney General (OAG) – Engaged by MDE pursuant to Notice of Referral issued February 18, 2026.
- Maryland Department of Health (MDH) – Public health coordination.
- Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and Charles County Health Departments – Recreational contact advisory determinations.
- DC Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) – Coordination on recreational advisories and regional water quality monitoring.
- University of Maryland – Sediment sample analysis using dPCR technology for HF183, E. coli, and other fecal indicators.
- Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) – Regional water quality monitoring data.

Appendix B: Key Correspondence

The following key correspondence documents the regulatory actions taken by MDE in connection with the PI failure:

- February 18, 2026 – MDE to DC Water: Initial formal letter regarding sanitary sewer overflows and Notice of Referral to the Maryland Office of the Attorney General.
- March 12, 2026 – MDE to DC Water: Formal direction to submit a revised Remediation and Restoration Plan; detailed addendum specifying plan components including

comprehensive impact characterization, corrective measures, restoration strategy, long-term monitoring, and prevention of future PI overflows.

- March 26, 2026 – DC Water to MDE: Response to March 12 letter, including progress update and questions regarding sediment sampling methodology.

These documents are available upon request from MDE's Water and Science Administration.

Appendix C: Abbreviations

C&O Canal	Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
CIP	Capital Improvement Plan
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
DC Water	District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority
DNR	Maryland Department of Natural Resources
DOEE	DC Department of Energy and Environment
dPCR	Digital Polymerase Chain Reaction
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HF183	Human-specific fecal marker (genetic marker for human fecal contamination)
ICPRB	Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin
MDE	Maryland Department of the Environment
MDH	Maryland Department of Health
MGD	Million Gallons per Day
MSI	Multi-Sensor Inspection
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
OAG	Maryland Office of the Attorney General
PI	Potomac Interceptor
RCP	Reinforced Concrete Pipe
SSO	Sanitary Sewer Overflow
UMD	University of Maryland
UMCES	University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey