

Wis. tunnel fix could dump sewage in water

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Milwaukee officials warn that a court order to line a deep tunnel with concrete could cause sewage to dump into the city's rivers and Lake Michigan.

State and local officials say Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Jean DiMotto's ruling that the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District must install the concrete lining in the one-mile stretch of tunnel to stop groundwater from seeping into the tunnel could force the entire tunnel system to be shut down for a year or more.

"There are no controls to shut off one leg or the other. It was designed to operate as a single unit," said Chuck Burney, a Department of Natural Resources special assistant assigned to monitor MMSD sewage overflows. "It is either in service or out of service."

Proponents of the order say the seepage has lowered the water table beneath downtown Milwaukee, causing old wood pilings beneath some buildings to rot when exposed to air.

"We are pleased with the court's ruling," said Rick White, a spokesman for Wisconsin Energy.

"We believe the damage is continuing and this order would stop that," White said. "Lining the tunnel would solve the problem."

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