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Mississippi town sued over sewage flowing into neighborhood

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CENTREVILLE, Miss. (AP) - Sewage overflows during heavy rains have fouled a poor neighborhood in Centreville for years because the city has failed to fix its sewage system, a lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit was filed against Centreville on Tuesday in federal court by the Gulf Restoration Network, a New Orleans-based environmental group. The group announced the suit Wednesday.

The suit alleges the town is violating the Clean Water Act by allowing sewage to flow into tributaries of Stafford Creek during heavy rains. The suit charges the sewage also gets into a neighborhood in south Centreville by coming up through two manholes and through cracked pipes.

The suit claims the city and Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality have failed to take action to stop the sewage overflows.

Mayor Larry J. Lee did not return a telephone call Wednesday seeking comment.

Robbie Wilbur, a spokesman for MDEQ, said the agency was not involved in the suit and could not comment on "the truthfulness of the allegations in the complaint."

Andrew Whitehurst, the water program director for Gulf Restoration Network, said MDEQ investigators were aware of the problems but failed to enforce state regulations and order repairs.

"They tolerated sewage spillages in violation of the Clean Water Act and state regulations," Whitehurst said.

The suit was filed in the Southern District of Mississippi.

The Gulf Restoration Network said sewage gets into yards and homes. The problems, the suit contends, stem from discharges of sewage from the Centreville South Treatment Plant during heavy rains.

"This has been a long process and our sewage troubles have always been ignored," said Sherry Jefferson, a resident who lives in the neighborhood that allegedly suffers from the sewage contamination.

"We need to take this step because of health issues that have gotten worse over time," she said in a statement issued by the Gulf Restoration Network.

The suit says the sewage overflows have been a problem for at least five years. The suit seeks to get the city to fix its problems by installing back-up equipment and repairing the sewage system.

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