



The [New York Times supplies](#) another excellent installment on its series about an often-overlooked environmental problem: outdated and overwhelmed municipal water and sewage systems.

State and federal studies indicate that thousands of water and sewer systems may be too old to function properly.

For decades, these systems — some built around the time of the Civil War — have been ignored by politicians and residents accustomed to paying almost nothing for water delivery and sewage removal. And so each year, hundreds of thousands of ruptures damage streets and homes and cause dangerous pollutants to seep into drinking water supplies.

Even the latest stimulus money, which totals \$10 billion to help these systems, pales in comparison to the need, which the EPA estimates as a whopping **\$335 billion**. The article does not detail where the EPA got its number from, and such things can be overstated, but this is not a good sign. (Since the EPA would be unlikely to administer these funds, I doubt that this is self-dealing on the part of the agency).

We might also remember the damage that sewage can do to endangered species, and its potentially devastating effect on biodiversity, aspects that the article does not mention.

But there was one particularly painful part of the article, which focused on George Hawkins, a former environmental advocate who now runs Washington D.C.'s system:

Mr. Hawkins — who at 49 has the bubbling energy of a toddler ***and the physique of an aging professor*** — told the crowd that the average age of the city's water pipes was 76, nearly four times that of the oldest city bus.

Ahem. I resemble that remark.