

## Summary

Things are going badly awry in our water systems. Unprecedented droughts are drying up key reservoirs in some places. Millions of gallons of raw sewage flood out in others. And in Texas, fracking water pumped underground is reemerging as geysers. We've neglected these issues, always thinking they can be addressed later. And now the bills are starting to come due.

Water problems are popping up all over. Literally so, in at least one case. In the Permian basin, geysers of toxic wastewater are erupting. The water was pumped underground as part of the basin's massive fracking operations. Fracking produces five or six barrels of wastewater for every barrel of oil. High pressure underground is pushing wastewater into oil and gas basins as well as threatening drinking water aquifers. That's starting to happen in Ohio, too, which has becoming the [disposal site](#) for hundreds of millions of gallons of Pennsylvania's fracking wastewater.) According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), which is not exactly the most "woke" newspaper in the country, "the fracas above ground is raising questions about how the Permian can sustain red-hot production without causing widespread environmental damage that could leave taxpayers on the hook—and complicate the region's economic plans."

Elsewhere in Texas, the city of Corpus Cristi is running low on water and may need to cut supplies to refineries and industry. The city is a petrochemical hub, and its port is a major export hub for oil. The city relies on surface water from reservoirs, which are drying up in a five-year drought. According to the [city manager](#), it's a case of procrastination and denial: "You've heard about it in local government, the old adage of kicking the can down the road, The fact that the system is not robust enough for a growing region, the fact that we haven't brought on a new water supply in 30 years, the fact we've had to make substantial — in the past five years — investments because we hadn't done it for decades prior, is all the evidence you need."

And then there's the Colorado River, which supplies water to 20 million people and 5 million acres of farms. The river is in crisis. Ninety-five percent of the river basin is [now](#) in drought. Demand for water has outpaced supply during a regionwide drought, with groundwater running out, the worst snowpack ever recorded, and key reservoirs are down 75% from their peaks, hitting record lows. Everyone has known

about the problem for years but the states couldn't agree on a solution. The federal government is [proposing](#) a plan that could cut water supplied to Arizona, California, and Nevada by up to 40%. The states are dithering, and the Feds are reluctantly being forced to intervene.

On the other side of the country, 240 million gallons of sewage poured into the Potomac after a major pipe collapsed five miles upstream from D.C. Scientists found high levels of bacteria like E. coli and antibiotic-resistant Staph aureus (MRSA. )This spill is part of a larger picture of neglect. Sewage systems built in mid-century are at the end of their useful lives and starting to break down. The Potomac leak may have set a record, but Fort Lauderdale came close a few years earlier. The more intense rainfalls brought on by climate change are further overstressing sewage systems.

These events have a variety of causes, but the upshot is that we're failing to stay on top of potential problems. The drought gripping the Southwest is a clear example, and part of the failure is a determined effort to ignore the reality of climate change. The sewage break in D.C. and the toxic water geysers in the Permian Basin are more a matter of neglect. We've been taking our ability to obtain water and manage discharges for granted, just as we tend to take plumbing for granted except when it starts leaking or breaking down. It appears that our neglect is beginning to catch up with us.