

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2010  
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DOJ (202) 514-2007  
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**PUERTO RICO AQUEDUCT AND SEWER AUTHORITY TO SPEND MORE THAN \$195 MILLION  
ON IMPROVEMENTS TO 126 DRINKING WATER PLANTS**

*Will Pay \$1 Million Civil Penalty and Undertake \$2.5 Million Water Quality Project*

SAN JUAN—The Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) has agreed to implement major capital improvements and upgrades to resolve alleged longstanding violations of the Clean Water Act at 126 drinking water plants across the island and violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act at three others, the Justice Department and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today. Most of the communities served by the drinking water treatment plants that will be upgraded under the agreement are in low income communities.

The agreement, filed in federal court in the District of Puerto Rico, requires PRASA to implement measures to properly handle harmful pollution from 126 drinking water treatment plants that discharge into Puerto Rico's lakes, rivers and streams, some of which are sources of drinking water. The work required by the agreement, when fully implemented by PRASA, is estimated to cost more than \$195 million.

The announcement was made today by John Cruden, Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, Rosa Rodriguez-Velez, U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico and Judith Enck, EPA Regional Administrator for Region 2.

PRASA will also pay a \$1.02 million civil penalty and spend more than \$2.5 million to improve the water quality of either Lake Toa Vaca or both Lake Toa Vaca and Lake Cidra. The consent decree filed today replaces two prior agreements between PRASA and the federal government, one from 1995 and one from 2001. It provides for a comprehensive and integrated set of measures aimed at ending PRASA's cycle of past violations.

"Today's settlement agreement sets the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority on a clear path to improve the infrastructure of their facilities, reduce the amount of harmful pollutants entering the environment and ultimately provide safer drinking water to the people of Puerto Rico," said Assistant Attorney General Moreno.

"The long-overdue improvements that will result from this agreement will enhance water quality across Puerto Rico, especially in low income communities," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck. "Millions of pounds of potentially harmful pollutants will be kept out of Puerto Rico's lakes, rivers and streams, which means a healthier environment and improved public health."

EPA estimates that the agreement will reduce by 15 million pounds annually the amount of suspended solids discharged into Puerto Rico's lakes, rivers and streams, some of which are sources of drinking water. Suspended solids are small particles that can carry pathogens potentially harmful to human health and the environment, and can harm water quality by consuming oxygen.

EPA also estimates that discharges of residual chlorine will be reduced by 600,000 pounds per year and discharges of total phosphorous will be reduced by 250,000 pounds per year. Chlorine is used in the treatment process as a disinfectant and phosphorus is in the source water. Phosphorus comes from a number of sources, including fertilizers and detergents. Excess phosphorus in water can lead to significant water quality problems including harmful algal blooms, low oxygen levels, and declines in wildlife and wildlife habitat. Too much chlorine in drinking water can cause eye and nose irritation and stomach discomfort.

Under the consent decree, PRASA will implement multiple capital improvement projects and other upgrades at 126 drinking water treatment plants and related systems over the next 15 years. PRASA will complete 291 short-, mid-, and long-term capital improvement projects, which will include the construction of 34 treatment systems at facilities that currently are discharging untreated sludge into local waterways, installation of flow meters and high-level indicators at all PRASA facilities, improvements to sampling locations, capacity evaluations at over 50 facilities, implementation of an island-wide preventive maintenance program and facility operator training.

**PRASA's efforts to improve the water quality of either Lake Toa Vaca or both Lake Toa Vaca and Lake Cidra will address the growing amount of nutrients in the lakes, both of which are drinking water sources for portions of Puerto Rico. Increased levels of nutrients in water bodies can severely impact ecosystems and human health. As a supplemental environmental project, PRASA will set aside \$2.2 million to design and construct an aeration system that will increase oxygen levels in the lakes and an additional \$324,000 to operate and maintain the system. This project, when implemented, will enhance the condition of the aquatic ecosystem and restore the water quality of the lakes. A supplemental environmental project is an environmentally-beneficial project that a violator voluntarily agrees to undertake in a settlement and one the violator would not otherwise be required to perform.**

The consent decree, lodged in the U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico, is subject to a 30-day public comment period and approval by the federal court. A copy of the consent decree is available on the Justice Department website at [www.justice.gov/enrd/Consent\\_Decrees.html](http://www.justice.gov/enrd/Consent_Decrees.html).