

All municipalities would need to regularly renew their storm-water drain permits with the EPA. The drains are used by residents and businesses alike, making it likely that towns and cities would try to educate homeowners about proper fertilizer use and pet-waste disposal.

The state's new Department of Transportation would be responsible for cutting down on phosphorus washing off its roadways, including the Massachusetts Turnpike, according to Bowditch. There are many new technologies that can be employed but one of the simpler actions is to use street sweepers more often, she said.

When it comes to regulating businesses, though, it could get complicated. The municipalities would have to figure out how to keep more phosphorus out of storm drains (and ultimately out of the river) with permits, ordinances, or zoning changes, said Bill Walsh-Rogalski, an EPA lawyer who worked on the draft.

For example, a town might create a regulation to require existing businesses to do more street sweeping, which can help capture phosphorus, or a city might require a new development to produce no new phosphorus, he said.

"The best thing to do is put the water back into the ground," said Walsh-Rogalski, rather than into storm drains, since phosphorus gets filtered out of water as it moves through soil.

Another player in the draft report is waste-water treatment facilities, which would have to reduce phosphorus by roughly 65 percent.

Here again, questions on cost surface.

"We are deeply concerned about the health of the Charles River but feel going to extremes may or may not help the river, but it will cost the users millions of dollars," said Cheri Cousens, an engineer and assistant chief operator for the Charles River Pollution Control District, which is based in Medway and also treats sewage for Franklin, Millis, and Bellingham.

Her plant has already brought down phosphorous levels significantly to meet federal standards, she said, and lowering it even more would require an additional treatment process, which translates into an upfront capital cost as well as new ongoing maintenance costs.

"Waste-water treatment plants are one source of phosphorus, and we think we're being unfairly targeted," she said.

Medfield is not quite as concerned. "Phosphorus is the easiest nutrient to remove," said Ken Feeney, superintendent of the town's Department of Public Works.

Peter Iafolla, chief operator of Medfield's waste-water plant, said that may be so, but chemicals needed to cut down phosphorus are expensive, and one in particular, sodium aluminate, can be dangerous for workers to handle. "I really don't like to use chemicals but it looks like the only way to do it," he said.

Bowditch acknowledged the concern about cost but said there are models around the country and even in Massachusetts for addressing that.

For example, some municipalities, including Newton, have set up a storm-water agency that charges a fee to residents and businesses - like a water or sewer bill, Bowditch said, but much lower - that helps pay for whatever techniques are needed to keep phosphorus (or other contaminants) out of waterways.

"I don't disagree with them that cost is a legitimate thing for all of us to look at," she said.

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1