Hurricane Sandy caused an unprecedented amount of damage to New York City’s wastewater infrastructure. This damage included the flooding of wastewater treatment plants and pumping stations as well as combined sewage overflows throughout the city. This resulted in the release of millions of gallons of untreated sewage, which contaminated waterways, flood debris, and buildings. Federal and municipal governments have since proposed plans to protect wastewater infrastructure from future storms with magnitudes consistent with climate change predictions. However, an issue that is under-addressed is that although many of these plans are written to prepare for 2020 climate change predictions, many have not yet gone into affect and do not yet have adequate funding. Lack of funding has resulted in New York City’s wastewater infrastructure remaining unprotected.

This project examines the public health risks to New York City’s population if wastewater infrastructure is not updated to reflect the climate change realities of increased sea level rise, precipitation, storm frequency, and storm intensity. Public health concerns include both a large-scale disease outbreak caused by a waterborne pathogen and health issues associated with contamination of homes and buildings by industrial waste from superfund sites. The cost of inadequate action to protect wastewater infrastructure from future storm damage may be the wellbeing of the city’s population.