



For immediate release: Monday, September 15, 2025

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Campbell Soup admits to more than 5,000 days of Clean Water Act violations

Wastewater has polluted Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie

TOLEDO, Ohio - In a [court document](#) filed jointly with plaintiffs Environment Ohio, Lake Erie Waterkeeper, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, defendant Campbell Soup Supply Co. admitted on Monday that it is legally liable for violating the [Clean Water Act](#) at least 5,400 times from April 2018 through December 2024 at its massive canning factory in Napoleon, Ohio.

“Campbell’s admission that it committed these violations will speed this case toward a trial that will decide what steps the company must take to curb its pollution and how large a civil penalty should be imposed. That’s great news for the people who live along the Maumee River and Lake Erie, who want prompt action on reducing sources of the toxic algae in their local waters,” said [John Rumpler](#), the **Clean Water Program director for Environment Ohio**. “We appreciate Campbell’s willingness to work cooperatively with us and the federal government to solve its compliance problems, rather than spending time and effort contesting clear-cut violations of the Clean Water Act.”

The lawsuit, [filed in March 2024](#), alleged violations of effluent limits on phosphorus, ammonia, E. coli bacteria, oil and grease, suspended solids, and other harmful pollutants. The facility’s contaminated wastewater flows into the Maumee River and, subsequently, into Lake Erie.

“Pollution flowing into western Lake Erie from the Maumee River, containing Campbell’s phosphorus discharges, contributes to the lake’s [toxic algal blooms](#),” explained **Sandy Bihn**, who has served as the [Lake Erie Waterkeeper](#) since 2004. “Bringing an end to Campbell’s

violations will help water quality in the river and Lake Erie, and demonstrates the power citizen enforcement suits have to drive meaningful environmental progress.”

The parties filed the joint “stipulation” to liability in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio. In the stipulation, Campbell, a wholly owned subsidiary of Campbell Soup Co., agrees not to assert any defenses to liability for those violations, and admits that the citizen groups’ members were harmed by the violations and thus have legal standing to sue to enforce the Clean Water Act along with the government.

Under the Clean Water Act, private citizens can bring enforcement actions directly against violators in federal court, seeking civil penalties and court orders to stop violations and address environmental harm. The parties anticipate going to trial next year to determine the appropriate remedy for Campbell’s years of now-admitted violations.

Environment Ohio is a statewide, citizen-based, environmental advocacy organization working for clean air, clean water and protecting Ohio’s open spaces. For more information about our work, visit www.EnvironmentOhio.org. Environment Ohio is part of Environment America, a policy and action group with one mission: to protect and restore the natural world.

Lake Erie Waterkeeper is a licensed member of the international Waterkeeper Alliance, and advocates for swimmable, drinkable, fishable waters in the Lake Erie watershed. For more information, visit www.LakeErieWaterkeeper.org

The groups are represented by the Boston-based, non-profit National Environmental Law Center (www.NELC.org), which represents citizen groups across the country in actions to enforce the nation’s environmental laws, and by attorneys Christos Georgalis and Matthew Jalandoni of the Cleveland law firm Flannery Georgalis LLC.

Environment Ohio, Environment America and the National Environmental Law Center are part of The Public Interest Network, which operates and supports organizations committed to a shared vision of a better world and a strategic approach to social change.