Sewers: Resolving Overflows from the Sauquoit Creek Pumping Station

Oneida County Permit Compliance and Sewer Abatement Project

A multi-year sewer infrastructure evaluation and improvement project being undertaken by Oneida County as part of a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Consent Order is currently underway. The Consent Order focuses on wet weather sewer discharges into the Mohawk River from the Sauquoit Creek Pumping Station service area.

This area includes the villages of Clayville, New Hartford, New York Mills, Oriskany, Whitesboro and Yorkville, and the towns of New Hartford, Paris and Whitestown.

The Situation

The sanitary sewers in this area are intended to only convey sanitary sewage. However, clean stormwater and groundwater, known in engineering terms as inflow and infiltration (I/I), is finding its way into the sanitary sewer system such that during major rainfall and snow melt events, the sanitary sewer system becomes overloaded, causing the Sauquoit Creek Pumping Station to bypass this excess flow to the Mohawk River. NYSDEC is requiring that this condition be eliminated.

The Problem

We know from the experience of other communities that the problem likely stems as much from private property sewer laterals and improper hookups (footing drains, sump pumps, roof leaders) as it does from lines owned by towns, villages and the County. Many property owners may not even know these improper connections exist.

Consequently, the Oneida County Sewer District must work closely with each member municipality to eliminate overflow problems by removing excess I/I from the system. However, there are significant challenges involved because of legal and privacy issues, easements, ownership and funding to cover the cost of repairs.

Collaboration Needed

A Steering Committee was created in November 2007 to provide project oversight and to act as liaisons to the community for gathering its input and sharing information about project status and activity. Residents and business owners are encouraged to utilize this resource to communicate concerns about issues that may directly or indirectly impact them. The first steps in determining the sources of excess I/I in the system and identifying specific projects that can be undertaken to remove it are currently underway.

Manhole inspections have begun in most district member communities to identify problem areas and sources of excess I/I. Flow meters have been installed in municipal sewers and county interceptor sewers as part of an ongoing monitoring program that will indicate where excessive flows are originating. This data will be used to pinpoint problem areas and to determine corrective action.

In addition, informational meetings with planning boards and code officers will continue to take place over the coming months to advise officials on the new processes involved with obtaining approvals for development projects. As the project moves forward, community meetings will be held with local officials and residents to share information and voice concerns.

Looking Ahead

Each resident can play a role in this effort by communicating ideas, suggestions and information that can help resolve these issues. That information will be brought before the project consulting team and the Steering Committee for further study, evaluation and action. Collectively and individually, we all must do our parts to maintain an operationally efficient sewer system that complies with state regulations, ensures the public's health and safety, and protects and preserves the environment.

For more information, please contact Steven Devan PE, Commissioner, Oneida County Department of Water Quality and Water Pollution Control (798-5656) or a member of the Steering Committee. Visit the project website at www.ocgov.net and browse to the "SSO Abatement Project" link.