

What Is A Sewage Overflow?

During wet weather (*when it rains or snow melts*), excess water overloads the deteriorated sewer system and overflows into rivers and streams or backs up into residents' basements without ever reaching the wastewater treatment facility. Hundreds of overflows occur across Allegheny County during each rainstorm.

A Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) occurs when stormwater and sewage, carried in a single pipe, overload the sewer system and flow untreated into rivers and streams. CSOs contain a variety of pollutants such as debris, chemicals, bacteria, and animal waste.

A Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) occurs when a line designed to carry only sewage becomes overloaded with stormwater. This causes untreated sewage to overflow from manholes or back up into basements.

Both types of wet weather overflows violate federal and state environmental laws. Regulatory agencies are now requiring the region to fix the problem at a cost estimated to be billions of dollars.



*Overflowing manhole
On Cover: A combined sewer overflow.*

Why Is This Occurring?

The region's sewer system, parts of which are more than 100 years old, is showing its age. Sections of the sewer system lack capacity. Cracked and deteriorated pipes allow rain and snow melt to leak into the system. Overgrown tree roots in the pipes can inhibit flow. In addition many households have improperly connected downspouts or sump pumps which force stormwater into the sewer lines designed to carry only sewage.



Broken house lateral line

Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Sewage in our rivers, creeks, and streams could be a public health risk for those who come in contact with the water. Waterways may be unacceptable for boating, swimming or fishing for days after it stops raining.
- Nearly all Allegheny County residents get their drinking water from our three rivers. Overflows can pollute our source of drinking water placing a burden on water treatment facilities.
- Sewage overflows impede economic development as communities can be restricted from tapping into sewers for new homes or businesses.
- These overflows can kill fish and other aquatic life.

Who Is Responsible For Fixing The Problem?

Municipalities, your wastewater treatment facility and you each have a significant role in solving the problem.

Municipalities are now required by environmental regulators to address the problem by mapping their sewers, assessing and repairing broken lines, cleaning lines, measuring the flow of stormwater and wastewater during different weather conditions. The goal is to reduce excess stormwater entering the system.

In addition, regulators are requiring the wastewater treatment facility to increase treatment capacity, reduce the frequency of combined sewer overflows, and reduce pollutants entering waterways.

Homeowners that are connected to a separate sanitary sewer system (designed to carry only sewage) must fix improper sewer connections on their property by disconnecting downspouts and driveway or foundation drains. Homeowners can also help by reducing the amount of water and pollutants entering the sewer system from their properties.

Unfortunately, solutions may cost billions of dollars. This is the most costly public works project ever faced by Allegheny County. Your sewer rates are likely to increase to pay for improvements to the wastewater treatment facility and municipal collection system. However, municipalities and the wastewater treatment facility are working together to develop the most cost-effective solutions.

What Can You Do To Help Solve The Problem?

You can begin to make an immediate difference by taking the following steps:

- Disconnect downspouts, driveway or foundation drains, groundwater sump pumps or any other stormwater connection from the sanitary sewer system. Check to see if your municipality has a combined or sanitary sewer system.
- Re-direct your downspouts so that rain soaks into your yard or garden.
- Have the line that connects your house with the public sewer line (*called a house lateral*) inspected. Repairing broken laterals, which is the homeowner's responsibility, can reduce infiltration of stormwater and prevent sewer backups into your home.
- To reduce stormwater runoff, plant trees and other vegetation. Plant away from known sewer lines to prevent root growth into the pipes.
- Wash your car at a commercial self car wash that recycles water.
- Use toxic-free home and garden products. When it rains, pesticides and other chemicals are washed into the stormwater system and can discharge untreated into area waterways.
- Don't use storm drains, located along street curbs, as garbage cans. Do not dispose of household hazardous waste, such as automotive fluid, down storm drains.
- Remain informed about the issue.



Improperly connected downspout

For more information about the sewage overflow issue, contact:
The Overflow Connection at **1-877-OVERFLOW**

or visit www.OverflowConnection.com

Mail questions or comments to:

The Overflow Connection
P.O. Box 99674
Pittsburgh, PA 15233

THE OVERFLOW CONNECTION

YOUR HOME. YOUR RIVERS. MAKE THE CONNECTION.

The Overflow Connection is a coalition of organizations that are committed to helping solve the wet weather issue and protect the region's water resources in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Members are:

3 Rivers Wet Weather Demonstration Program
ALCOSAN
Allegheny Conference on Community Development
Allegheny County
Allegheny County Health Department
City of Pittsburgh
PA Department of Environmental Protection
The Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority

Did you know that millions of gallons of sewage are polluting our waterways?

Did you know that you are contributing to the problem?



Learn why sewage overflows occur and what you can do to help solve one of the most important environmental & economic issues to face this region.