



# PETERS TOWNSHIP SANITARY AUTHORITY

## NEWSLETTER

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### SEWER RATE ADJUSTMENT

Effective February 16, 2009, the quarterly Minimum Service Charge will increase by \$1.75 from \$29.25 to \$31.00 and the Sewer Use Charge will increase by \$.90 from \$4.15/1000 gallons to \$5.05/1000 gallons. This rate increase is necessary because of the inflationary factors, a slow down in home construction, reduced water consumption by both residential and commercial customers, and in order to maintain the current level of service. This is the largest rate increase the Authority has enacted since 1993, and the first time it has increased the Minimum Service Charge since 1993. For the average residential customer that uses 14,700 gallons, of water per quarter, the rate increase is 16.6% or \$14.98 per quarter. Even after the

### WET WEATHER SEWAGE ISSUES

This Newsletter is devoted to an important issue that all of our customers should become familiar with, and one that will serve to minimize sewer charges in the long term.

During extreme rain events rainwater/groundwater entering the sanitary sewer through pipe defects and prohibited connections can exceed the capacity of the sewer, causing raw sewage to erupt from manholes, or worse, backup sewage into basements. Furthermore, the volume of water conveyed to the treatment plant can exceed the volume that can be treated effectively, thereby reducing the water quality discharged to the receiving stream. During extreme rain events the sewage flow received at the treatment plant can increase ten-fold.

This wet weather problem is not new, nor is it limited to Peters Township. Many nearby communities are under "tap bans" that severely limit customer growth until the sewer problems are addressed. In some cases, regulatory agencies issue consent orders establishing how the problem will be addressed. For example, the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) and the 83 communities it serves, are under consent orders to eliminate untreated wet weather sewer discharges, at an estimated cost of \$4 billion dollars.

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The Authority owns 120 miles of sanitary sewers which collect wastewater from its 5,800 customers. These sewers convey the wastewater to the treatment plant, where pollutants are removed, and then the treated wastewater is discharged to the receiving stream. Additionally, each home owner owns, and is responsible for maintaining their "building sewer", which connects the house's plumbing drain system to the public sewer. All underground pipes are subject to deterioration, and eventual failure, due to things like ground movement, roots growing into pipe joints, gasket deterioration, and external factors (*such as an oak tree planted directly over a sewer that can crush the sewer as the tree matures*). During rain events the rainwater/groundwater can leak into the sanitary sewer through these pipe defects, and through prohibited connections such as roof downspouts, and foundation footer drains. The sanitary sewer was not designed to receive the clean water from these sources, and it is this clean water leaking into the sewer that causes sewer problems during extreme wet weather events. It is of great importance to this Authority, as it should be to each of our customers, to minimize and eventually eliminate the rainwater/groundwater that enters the public sewer system. Not only will its elimination help improve the environment, but it will serve to lower future construction and operating costs, thereby keeping the cost of sewage service lower. Much of 2009's 16.6% rate increase is due to expanding the Authority's facilities to manage wet weather sewage flows. If we continue to ignore the true source of the wet weather sewage problem, regular and large increases in our sewer rates will be required.

rate increase, the Authority's charge for sewage service is still lower than six nearby comparable service providers. The Authority's current sewer charge is still below the inflation adjusted 1985 sewer charge, the first year water consumption was used as the basis for billing. Even with the increase sewage service is a real value, and costs far less than any other utility.

#### TOTAL CUSTOMERS IN THE PTSA WATERSHED:

RESIDENTIAL 5,561      COMMERCIAL 272



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## COMBATING THE PROBLEM

The Authority administers programs designed to eliminate rainwater/groundwater from its system, including:

- Requires dye test inspections prior to sale of property to identify prohibited connections and requires their disconnection;
- Conducts area wide dye testing of neighborhoods that have been identified as contributing excessive wet weather flows;
- Conducts continuous sewer system flow monitoring to identify areas with excessive wet weather sewage flows;
- Performs video inspection of 24,000 linear feet of public sewer annually to identify defects, and schedule their repair; and
- Expends \$500,000 annually on sewer rehabilitation and capacity augmentation projects, with \$5 million dollars expended over the past 10 years. All of it paid for by your sewer use charges.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

During 2009 the Authority will be investing \$1 million in wet weather improvements to its Brush Run Treatment Plant, and by 2012 will be investing \$15 million to replace its Donaldson's Crossroads Treatment Plant, with at least half of the plant expansion's cost being due to providing wet weather capacity. Furthermore, Pennsylvania is expected to adopt more stringent water quality standards for nutrients (Nitrogen and Phosphorus) by 2012. If so, our treatment plants will have to undergo further multi-million dollar upgrades to meet the new standards, the cost of which will significantly increase due to wet weather sewage flows. Therefore, we have an opportunity to reduce future capital costs if we begin to seriously address the source of the wet weather flow. We have just barely enough time to realize some success in reducing wet weather sewage flows, if we implement the programs in 2009.

In order to reduce the wet weather sewage flow, the Authority will need to begin addressing groundwater originating on private property that enters through defects in the building sewer/building drain, and from prohibited foundation footer drains. It will be necessary to hold the property owners responsible to repair defective piping that contributes excessive volumes of groundwater and to remove foundation footer drains. Accordingly, the Authority's Management is developing a program for implementation in 2009 whereby it will identify properties discharging excessive volumes of groundwater during rain events. Those property owners will then be required to eliminate the discharge. The expense to some property owners can be significant. Public hearings will be held prior to adoption of the program. In the mean time, the Authority welcomes your comments.

Unfortunately, the Authority's efforts in reducing wet weather sewage flows are not succeeding. Peak wet weather sewage flows are essentially the same as they were 10 years ago.

**Why?** The reasons are believed to be the result of two major factors:

- 1) Groundwater Migration — when the public sewer is rehabilitated, most of the groundwater that previously leaked into the public sewer now migrates to nearby building sewers, entering the sewer system through building sewer defects; and
- 2) The total length of privately maintained building sewers of our 5,800 customers is approximately equal to the total length of public sewer. Until significant portions of the building sewers are made watertight, substantial progress will not be achieved. Video inspection of the public sewer during peak rain events reveals a substantial number of properties discharging considerable volumes of groundwater. Until these sources are removed, all of the Authority's customers will suffer the expense of continual expansion of the Authority's facilities to needlessly convey and treat groundwater.

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