



What the Wet Weather Management Plan Means for Columbus

What is the Wet Weather Management Plan?

- A comprehensive capital improvement plan for Columbus' sewer system to fully address the city's wet weather overflows and many basement backup problems across the city.
- The plan commits to a \$2.5 billion investment, in 2005 dollars, in the city's sewer system over the next 40 years.
- The plan was submitted to the Ohio EPA July 1, 2005.

Why is the plan necessary?

- This plan will bring the City of Columbus into full compliance with two Ohio EPA consent orders and reap substantial benefits for residents in the community. The plan also helps fulfill Mayor Michael B. Coleman's vision of making Columbus neighborhoods healthier, safer places for families.

What are the EPA Consent Orders?

- Like many cities across the U.S., Columbus entered into agreements to address wet weather sewer issues. A 2002 order requires a stop to **Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs)** into rivers and streams. A 2004 order calls for a reduction in **Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs)**. Columbus signed the agreements with the State of Ohio.

Why has this become such an issue?

- Sewer overflows were considered an acceptable practice to handle wet weather capacity issues and prevent basement backups when many of our sewers were built decades ago. This was long before current environmental regulations and advances in engineering and technology came along.

The plan will reduce pollution in our waterways and as result, make Columbus healthier.

- Overflows from the city's sewer system are currently responsible for more than 90% of the bacteria in some sections of the Scioto River following significant rain events. The WWMP improvements will reduce the effect of these overflows to the river to only 30% of today's bacterial load by 2010.
- Then by 2025, the plan will reduce the contribution from these overflows to a mere 7% of today's bacterial load following these storms.

Although a 40 year-plan, many environmental improvements will occur years before the projects are completed.

- More than 85% of the total average annual overflow volume reduction is expected during the first 20 years of the plan.
- The combined sewer overflow volume will be reduced by about 70% by 2010 and then by more than 99% by 2025. To stop CSOs at Whittier Street, a new sewer will be built to send flow to a new treatment facility at the Jackson Pike Wastewater Treatment Plant. Other combined sewer improvements include a new sewer from north of the Arena District to the Jackson Pike plant, the removal of stormwater and expanded storage facilities.

The improvements will reduce sanitary sewer overflows during heavy, extended rains.

- The city will construct two 14-foot-diameter tunnels to reduce SSOs. Stretching 25 miles total, they will be located:
 1. On the west side along the Olentangy River from approximately Bethel Road to Frank Road.
 2. On the east side along Alum Creek from approximately Morse Road to just south of I-270.

The Wet Weather Management Plan will reduce basement backups due to wet weather.

- The city has identified 12 "**Priority Areas**" that will receive individual attention to reduce basement backup problems in these neighborhoods. These neighborhoods have overflows and basement backups that the two large tunnels will not solve. The 12 priority areas are:

- Barthman – Parsons
- Castle – Williams
- Cleveland – Ferris
- Clintonville – Whetstone area
- Early Ditch (Binns – Wicklow)
- West 5th Avenue
- Miller – Kelton
- Northwest Alum Creek (Weldon – Lakeview)
- Plum Ridge
- Preston Road
- Sullivant Avenue
- Winslow

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Michael B. Coleman,
Mayor

How will the Wet Weather Management Plan affect my sewer bills?

- The city conducted an Affordability Analysis, which found that while the project will create significant rate increases, the study also determined the plan is affordable. *The plan does not affect water or stormwater rates.*
- It was estimated that over the 40-year plan, rates could rise as much as 2.6 times the average quarterly sewer bill of \$72 in 2005. Revenue needs will vary each year depending on a variety of factors, including the debt incurred from the improvement projects at that time.

How will sewer rates remain affordable?

- Under the plan, sewer rates will be reviewed annually to ensure that rates remain affordable.
- The planned schedule could slow if indicators show rates will exceed pre-determined levels of affordability.

What was considered in the Affordability Analysis?

- Many factors were considered, including:
 - Cost of living
 - Fixed incomes, poverty and unemployment data
 - Household income
 - Housing information
 - Effects on homeowners and renters

Is financial assistance available to help pay for these projects?

- Under the Clean Water Act, the federal government funded over 90% of the infrastructure changes in the 1970's and 1980's. Today, the federal government has virtually withdrawn such funding. Ratepayers now shoulder over 93% of the billions of dollars in capital and operating costs of our nation's sewer and water infrastructure. If this concerns you, please contact your congressional representatives.

Why a 40-year Plan?

- A 40-year schedule is more affordable by spreading the costs over a longer period of time.
- The city found little environmental difference between the 30 and 40 year schedules, as the most beneficial projects are scheduled for completion in the plan's earlier phases.
- A 20-year schedule was considered but was determined to be impractical due to constructability, schedule compression costs and other issues.

Won't the voted bond package that Columbus residents approved pay for these projects?

- The bond packages help by providing the city with low interest loan funding. The Division of Sewerage and Drainage uses that program along with other low interest loan programs, such as those available through the Ohio EPA.

Will the plan bring any economic benefit to our area?

- Yes. According to the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce, \$12.5 billion in economic benefits is expected. This includes an average of 1,281 construction jobs and 2,897 total jobs annually, generating \$4.5 billion in payroll and \$76.4 million in tax receipts over 40 years.

If the plan will solve wet weather capacity issues that cause basement backups, will the Project Dry Basement program be discontinued?

- The City of Columbus plans to continue that backflow prevention program for single and two-family homes for as long as it is needed to protect homes from backups due to wet weather surcharging and blockages in the city's sewers.

Can I do anything to control my sewer bill?

- Yes. Sewer charges are based on water consumption, so being conservative with water use can help greatly. Examples: only run the dishwasher and washing machine with full loads, fix leaks and drips and consider installing low-flow fixtures such as shower heads. Other ideas include capturing rain in containers such as rain barrels to water plants, and water only when needed. Income-eligible seniors over 60 may qualify for a senior citizen discount - call Customer Service at 645-8270. Residents who use a high volume of water that does not enter the sanitary sewer for watering lawns or filling a pool may want to consider an auxiliary meter. For more information on auxiliary meters, call 645-8164.

Where can I learn more about the Columbus Wet Weather Management Plan?

- A large and comprehensive document, the plan fills 22 binders. It can be viewed at:
 - Columbus Utilities Complex; 910 Dublin Road (by appointment, call 645-7176)
 - City of Columbus Fairwood Avenue Facility; 1250 Fairwood Avenue (by appointment, call 645-7631)
 - Columbus Metropolitan Library; Main Branch; 96 South Grant Ave. (no appointment necessary)
 - CD sets can be purchased at the 910 Dublin Road Permit Office (third floor) for \$2.00
 - Various documents are available on the Division of Sewerage and Drainage web site: www.sewers.columbus.gov ("Project Clean Rivers").

