

What You Should Know... Rain & Stormwater

The City sewer system contains some pipes for sewage, others for storm water, and others that carry both sewage and storm water, known as combined sewers. Some rain events cause the combined sewers to overflow into Oil Creek and the Allegheny River. There are discharge points along these waterways where combined sewage is allowed to overflow when the pipe network cannot handle the volume of flow.

Keeping the Pipes Clean & Drains Clear

The pipes within the sewage collection system provide some storage volume for rain events. During dry weather, the pipes can handle the flows, but during wet weather, they fill up with combined sewage. By keeping street and other debris out of the sewer pipes, they will have more space available for combined sewage.

Catch basins, or drain inlets, along streets often collect gravel and other debris. When this debris washes into the pipes, it takes up valuable space inside the pipes.

When drain inlets are clogged with autumn leaves or debris, stormwater will keep on flowing around them. This may flood roadways or private property. Uncontrolled stormwater erodes our streets.

The City sweeps streets and cleans catch basins periodically, but every rain event causes runoff of more debris, and leaves quickly gather on inlets in the autumn.

Drain inlets are for rain water only! They are not for the disposal of trash, yard debris, or any other foreign matter.

Everyone can help by cleaning off drainage grates regularly, picking up trash, and maintaining drainage channels. This will reduce sewage overflows to waterways, and control flooding. Keeping sidewalks and other hard surfaces in your neighborhood swept clean will also help reduce the debris carried away by rain.

Controlling Stormwater

If you've ever noticed a waterway that is brown when it rains, you have witnessed erosion. Erosion and flooding can be caused by runoff. Any surface that cannot absorb water produces runoff during a rain event. These surfaces are called impervious.

Impervious surfaces, including rooftops, asphalt, and concrete, are prevalent in an urban community. When stormwater from rooftops goes into the same pipes that carry away sewage from a building, too much rain can cause these pipes to fill, and back up.

Keeping rain water out of the sewer system can benefit property owners as well as the environment, but managing stormwater can be tricky.

When rain water is allowed to infiltrate into the ground, runoff is reduced, and less stormwater goes into the sewer system. Some soils are impervious, and this requires manmade controls to manage stormwater. Stormwater controls are called Best Management Practices, or BMPs. Property owners can use BMPs to help reduce runoff, and control flooding and sewer back-ups. A manual of BMPs, along with other information, is available at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection website:

www.dep.state.pa.us

Also, check out: www.stormwaterpa.org

The City adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance in 2011, which contains regulations for new development; however, better stormwater management in existing neighborhoods would help reduce erosion and flooding, and would improve water quality and public health.

This guide was prepared for Oil City residents by the City Engineering Office, July 2015.

For more information on this guide please contact the City Engineering Office at 814-678-3020 or visit the City's website at www.oilcity.org

The City collects sewage and some stormwater and treats this wastewater at a treatment facility. After solids are removed through several steps, the remaining clear water is disinfected and discharged to the Allegheny River.

Sewage treatment processes are not normally designed to remove pharmaceuticals or other chemicals that may be in wastewater, and their presence can be harmful to aquatic life in rivers and streams.

Pharmaceuticals and other chemicals have been found in drinking water in some communities. Everything that goes down drains and toilets has the potential to end up in waterways, and eventually drinking water.

There is a collection box for medicines at the City's Police Department at 21 Seneca Street. This provides safe disposal of unwanted medications at no charge.

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Clogs can be caused by items that do not readily break down in water. These can include many types of "wipes" used for cleaning, some of which may be labeled as "flushable". Other common items found to cause clogs include sanitary napkins, and many types of cloth and items considered "disposable".

Please do not flush the following or similar items down a drain or toilet:

- Baby wipes
- Disinfectant wipes
- Moist wipes
- Sanitary napkins, tampons
- Toilet bowl scrub pads
- Paper towels, napkins
- Facial tissues
- Diapers
- Dental floss
- Cloth, clothing
- Plastic
- Medicines, vitamins, or other pharmaceuticals

Potential Water Contamination

What happens to everything that goes down the drain, including the residues from fragrances, cosmetics, lotions, etc. washed from our bodies, and those excreted by our bodies, including vitamins and medicines?

What You Should Know... Your Sewer System

You may not give much thought to the sewer system, as long as waste goes down the drain and toilet and you never have to see it again.

Sewer Back-ups

But what if something doesn't go down the drain, or your sewer backs up? What should you do? How do you know if you or your family caused it?

Benjamin Franklin said "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." When it comes to sewers, the best way to prevent back-ups in your home is to be very careful of what you put down the sewer drain.

Many calls received by the City for sewage back-ups are the homeowner's responsibility, which means the clog is somewhere within the homeowner's sewer lateral pipe, and not in the sewer main owned by the City.

Clogged sewer laterals mean an expense for the homeowner; calling a plumber, for example, to snake the line, and maybe having to dig to repair the pipe or replace it. This can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars.