

A Regional Approach



to Municipal Sewer

The Pittsburgh region's deteriorated sewage infrastructure is creating unhealthy conditions in our streams and rivers. The sewage collection system within the ALCOSAN service area is an integrated network of systems that span more than 100 years. Adding to the complexity of the problem are the number of municipalities involved. Like gas and electricity services, sewage collection systems should be operated as a utility. One or several municipal authorities could more effectively operate and maintain the municipal sewage collection system. This type of regional approach would result in a system-wide, cost-effective, sustainable solution.

System Consolidation

Currently, 83 municipalities and authorities operate and maintain individual portions of the collection system independent of each other. However, this current process has limitations.

- ▼ It's ineffective because municipal systems are interconnected. Municipalities do not have complete control over flow from other communities—upstream and downstream. Therefore, municipalities need to cooperate to identify the causes of overflows and develop a system-wide solution.
- ▼ It's expensive due to the equipment and services required for the regular operation and maintenance of a sewer system. It is not cost-effective for each community to purchase its own equipment.
- ▼ It's not the most cost-effective approach. If individual municipalities make costly investments in one small part of the system, the investment may burden ratepayers more than necessary. Communities must work together to create a common vision for the future—one that incorporates the benefits of area-wide management and organizational strength and sustainability.
- ▼ Municipalities must develop a plan to assess and evaluate the entire collection system in a standardized, methodical manner. If municipalities continue to work only within their own boundaries to assess, evaluate and rehabilitate their portion of the system, compliance will be more difficult to achieve and more costly overall.

▼ Regional planning identifies the investments that are needed most. Addressing problems only within individual municipal boundaries is ineffective because the repair or rehabilitation may not significantly contribute to a system-wide reduction in overflows.

▼ Regional organizations have greater buying power. Municipalities can purchase public works supplies in bulk and pass the savings on to their communities.

▼ Regional action reduces duplication. Rather than each community owning the equipment necessary to maintain its sewage infrastructure, municipalities can share these resources.

▼ Regional financing saves money. Cooperative financing mechanisms, such as bond pools, can decrease the cost of borrowing money.

▼ New regulations require collaboration among neighboring municipalities. Municipalities are subject to increasingly stringent requirements covering the management and operation of a sewage collection system. With hundreds of interconnections among the municipal collection systems, regionalizing the operation can save time and money by consolidating operations and thereby reducing the number of permits and inter-municipal agreements needed.

▼ A regional approach reduces municipal burden. Removing the responsibility for the sewer collection system from municipal government allows officials to focus on projects that can be addressed within an individual community's boundaries.

▼ Regionalism results in a stronger voice in Harrisburg and Washington. Where a single municipal voice is often lost at the state or federal level, a regional voice can carry significant influence on issues such as enforcement and funding.

To begin developing a comprehensive regional strategy to solve the problem, municipal officials throughout the ALCOSAN service area have been participating in the 3 Rivers Wet Weather Basin Groups, meeting to develop a regionalization strategy that offers the best solution to a complex problem.

Exploring regional approaches for efficiently and cost-effectively rehabilitating the sewage infrastructure will not only help to meet federal, state and local requirements, it will help to improve southwestern Pennsylvania's water resources for generations to come.



Improving our region's water quality

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