EPA Region 4
Introduction to Conducting Evaluations
of
Municipal Wastewater Collection System
Management, Operation, and Maintenance Programs

Version 1.0

PURPOSE & DISCLAIMER

This document is the work product of the EPA Region 4, Water Management Division, Water Programs Enforcement Branch (WPEB) and supercedes a 10-30-1996 draft previously released. This document serves as an introduction for new Region 4 inspectors in the WPEB Municipal Infrastructure Enforcement Program and as introductory information for utilities invited to participate in the Region 4 Management, Operation, and Maintenance (MOM) Programs Project. Questions in this document are provided to initiate the thought process necessary for conducting an evaluation of a collection system. Formal instruction for conducting an evaluation under the MOM Programs Project is provided in separate literature.

The MOM Programs Project is conducted in compliance with EPA Policy, EPA Guidance, and Rules and Regulations promulgated under the Clean Water Act. If some statement or part of the document is not in compliance with the Act, EPA Policy, EPA Guidance or the Rules and Regulations, then it should not be construed as conveying rights not conveyed by the Clean Water Act, EPA Policy, or the Rules and Regulations.

September 2003

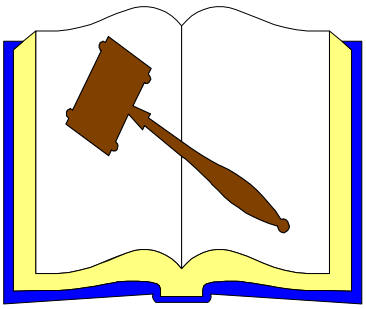
Introduction

Many collection systems have received minimal maintenance for many years. This has resulted in deteriorated sewers with a high potential for overflows, cave-ins, hydraulic overloads at treatment plants, and other problems. There are two central reasons for conducting an evaluation of a municipal collection system:

Public and Environmental Health

Sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) are a frequent cause of water quality violations. Beach closings, flooded basements, closed shellfish beds, and overloaded water treatment plants are a few of the symptoms of an inadequate collection system. Streams influenced by frequent SSOs support only the hardiest of species.

Legal Considerations

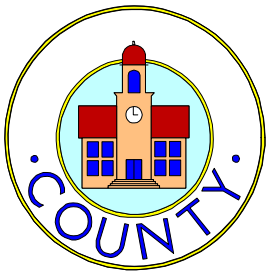


A discharge permit issued through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requires that the "permittee shall at all times properly operate and maintain all facilities and systems of treatment and control (and related appurtenances) that are installed or used by the permittee to achieve compliance with the conditions of this permit." SSOs may be considered a violation of this permit provision.

SSOs may also be considered an unpermitted discharge of pollutants from a point source, as defined in the Clean Water Act.

A goal of the collection system evaluation should be to discover if a utility is plagued by overflows and/or bypasses within its system of conveyance to a treatment facility. If so, what are the impacts? Is the utility aware of the problem? Are they taking appropriate steps to address the problem in a timely manner and prevent future reoccurrence?

Management



The first stop on any evaluation should be the "home office." This location is a point of administration, and may include functions such as utility management, finance, engineering, planning, procurement, warehousing, personnel, or legal review. In a large city, this work may be split between different departments. A small town may have only one or two people doing some of these activities. Much of the information needed from this source can be obtained before the evaluation by a written request. Areas of review should include:

✔ *Financial Administration*

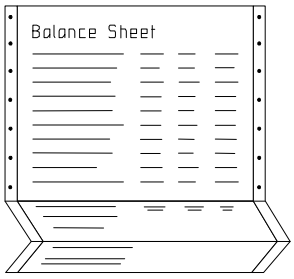
EPA and others have published guidance on the financial aspects of operating a wastewater utility. This is the single most important aspect of utility operation. Inadequate funding diminishes the chances for success.

User Rate/User Charge

- ! What are the utility's current rates?
- ! How are user rates calculated?
- ! How often are user charges adjusted based on that evaluation?
- ! Does the utility receive full funding from its revenue?
- ! Are utility funds used for other government activities?

Budget

The utility should be operating on an annual budget that details funding for all functions.



- ! Does the utility budget for annual operating costs?
- ! Does the budget provide sufficient itemization?
- ! Does the utility maintain a fund for future equipment and infrastructure replacement? How is work financed?

! Does the budget provide for sufficient funding?

Public Education/Outreach

The utility should be talking with the public on issues such as user rates and charges. It is up to the utility to educate the public on wastewater treatment, its impact on water resources, and the importance of keeping the user rates current. By maximizing resources and operating facilities efficiently, the utility may be able to delay increases in user rates for a short time. Adjustments for more efficient operation should be made before approaching the public on these issues.

! What type of public education/outreach programs does the utility have about the use of income from utility rates?

! Do these programs include communication with several groups such as local governments, community groups, the media, young people (schools, youth organizations)?

✔ *Personnel Administration*

Organization

! Is an organizational chart available which shows the various positions budgeted and filled?

! Are position descriptions available?

Operator Safety Program

A utility can have several levels of a safety program. It should consist of top administration, a safety department, a safety committee, and field personnel. For a small utility, top administration could be the mayor while a large utility could employ a personnel manager. All utilities should have a safety program that includes a safety policy, safety training and promotion, and accident investigation and reporting.

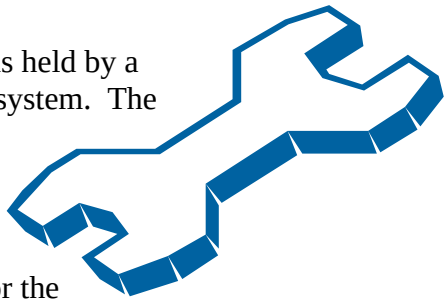
! Is there a documented safety program supported by a top administration official?

! Is there a safety department that provides training,

equipment, and an evaluation of procedures?

- ! Are all operators required to follow safe work procedures, such as the use of protective clothing and headgear, confined spaces, lock-out/tag-out policies, etc.?
- ! Is there a confined space entry procedure for manholes, wet wells, etc.?
- ! How often are safety procedures reviewed and revised?
- ! Does the safety department communicate with field personnel on safety by a procedures memo, direct communication, a video, etc.?

✔ *Equipment and Tools Administration*



The amount and types of equipment and tools held by a utility depend on the size, age, and condition of the system. The decision as to the type and amount of equipment to have on hand is a difficult one. A small utility may find it hard to justify the purchase of expensive, specialized equipment. The utility must identify the problems in the collection system and arrange for the appropriate tools and equipment accordingly. An alternative to purchasing is leasing, contracting, or sharing costs with other communities.

- ! Is there a list of equipment and tools used for operation and maintenance?
- ! Do field personnel feel they have access to the necessary equipment and tools to do all aspects of the operation and maintenance of its collection system?
- ! Is there access to suitable equipment if the utility's equipment is down for repair?
- ! Does the utility own or have ready access to a sufficient number of emergency power generators?
- ! Where does the utility store its equipment?
- ! Is a detailed equipment maintenance log kept?
- ! Are written equipment maintenance procedures available?

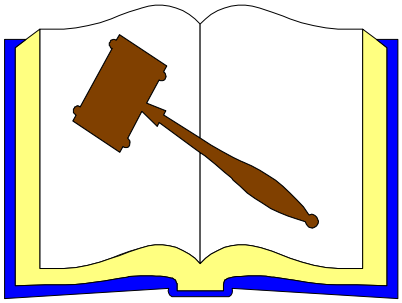
- What is the procedure for equipment replacement?

- If an in-house motor pool is used, what is the turnaround time for service?

Equipment that has reached its useful life should be replaced. To reduce the financial burden of equipment replacement, a fund should be established for equipment replacement. A utility should keep detailed records on the cost of operating the equipment to make good decisions about equipment replacement.

✔ *Legal Administration*

The utility should have legal documents to protect its collection system. Typically, sewer ordinances exist to satisfy Clean Water Act pretreatment regulations and to assure the utility's compliance with its NPDES permit. A legally sound sewer ordinance will give the utility retribution when corrosive and/or toxic materials are introduced into the collection system. Another important element is a grease control ordinance. Grease traps should be inspected by the utility for compliance. Some utilities choose to permit each trap owner.



- Is there a sewer use and a grease control ordinance?

- Is there active enforcement of the sewer and grease control ordinances?

- Are all grease traps inspected regularly?

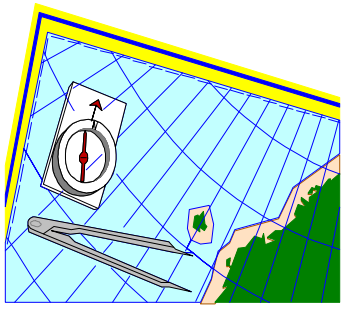
- How does the utility learn of new or existing grease traps?

- Who is responsible for enforcing the sewer ordinance and grease ordinance? Does this party communicate with the utility department on a regular basis?

- Are there any significant industrial dischargers to the system?

- Is there a pretreatment program in place?

✔ *Engineering Administration*



System Mapping and As-Built Plans

The utility should have an overall map of the collection system with sufficient detail to allow easy interpretation. There should be a collection system inventory organized by plant service areas that include the following information:

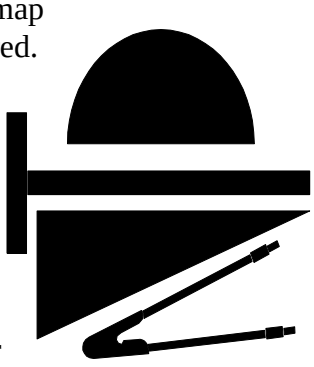
Gravity Lines:	Lineal feet by diameter
Manholes:	Number
Pump Stations:	Number by type
Force Mains:	Lineal feet by diameter
Air Release Valves:	Number and location
Inverted Syphons:	Number and location
Other Major Appurtenances:	Number and location
Service Population	By facility service area

A sewer atlas detailing the location of the above items should be available. The type of sewer atlas used by the utility will depend on their needs and resources. A large metropolitan utility may find that a sophisticated, computerized mapping system is required. A small community may be satisfied with a hand-drafted version.

! What type of mapping/inventory system is used?

! Is there a procedure for recording changes and updating the mapping system?

Mapping and inventory revisions should occur when there are changes in the collection system such as additions or repairs. Comprehensive maps of the system should be printed annually for large utilities, and a staff of "mappers" will likely be required to keep the maps up to date. Utilities may alternatively choose to contract map services. This is especially true if much catch-up work is required.



Design and Capacity Analysis

Through the interview and document review process, the evaluator should discover design procedures and the criteria needed for new work. In particular, the evaluator should discover how the utility determines the adequacy of the existing system for transmitting and treating future flows. The evaluator should discover what control the utility has over new connections to the system.

- Is there a document which details the design criteria and standard construction details. for gravity sewers, force mains, and pump stations?

- Is there a document that describes the procedures that the utility follows in conducting a design review? Are there any standard forms that guide the utility?

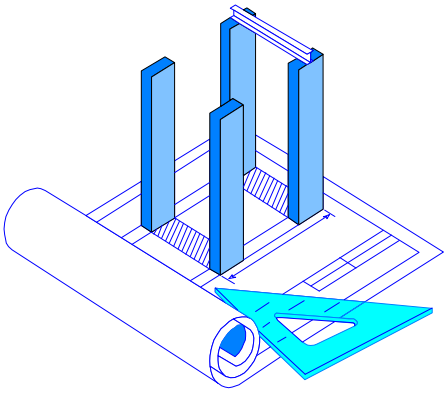
- What procedures are used in determining whether the existing sewer system capacity is adequate for new connections?

- Is any flow metering accomplished prior to allowing new connections?

- Is there a mathematical model of flow in the system used to predict the effects of new connections?

- Is any certification required which attests capacity is available for a new connection before it is made?

Construction



Through the interview and document review process, the evaluator should determine what procedures the utility uses to inspect and test new construction. These activities are important to ensure that new facilities do not contribute to future operation and maintenance problems. Excessive infiltration and inflow problems can exist with new construction if not properly built.

- Is there a document that describes the procedures that the utility follows in conducting their construction inspection and testing program? Are there any standard forms that guide the utility in conducting their construction inspection and testing program?

- Is new construction inspected by the utility or others?

- What are the qualifications of the inspector(s)?

- Is inspection supervision provided by a registered Professional Engineer?

- How is new construction tested? (air, water, weirs, etc.)

- Is new construction televised using closed-circuit camera techniques?

- Is new construction built to standard specs set by the local utility and/or the State?

- Is there a warranty for new construction? If so, is there a warranty inspection done at the end of this period?

Sewer System Evaluation Survey (SSES) and Rehabilitation

The SSES and sewer rehabilitation program is a structured methodology for finding the holes in a system and fixing them. Cost analysis is the major factor in determining the scope of rehabilitation. Due to the requirements of EPA's Construction Grants Program, many systems did evaluation surveys as a condition of their grant. Some systems also received grant funds for rehabilitation.

The SSES is a two-phase operation. The first phase is to gather preliminary information and technical data. Flow monitoring, records and map evaluations, and system inspection are some of the tasks to be completed. Prioritizing areas for further evaluation is the end result of phase one.

The second phase is to conduct further testing of the prioritized sewer areas identified in the preliminary phase and analyze these results. Rehabilitation recommendations based on a cost-effective analysis is the end result of phase two and concludes the SSES.

Rehabilitation may consist of a variety of techniques designed to reduce inflow and infiltration into the sewer system. Many methods are available with highly variable costs and service lives. Rehabilitation costs are usually significantly less than replacement costs.

SSES and rehabilitation activities are best described as a highly intensive program of operation and maintenance. Because over time many utilities have neglected proactive operation and maintenance of their sewer systems, these activities are often used to "catch-up" to a condition which can be maintained on a regular basis. Many of the techniques used in SSES and rehabilitation activities are described in the Operation and Maintenance section of this document, and should also be elements found in a proactive operation and maintenance program.

- Have SSES activities been performed in the past? If so, is documentation available?

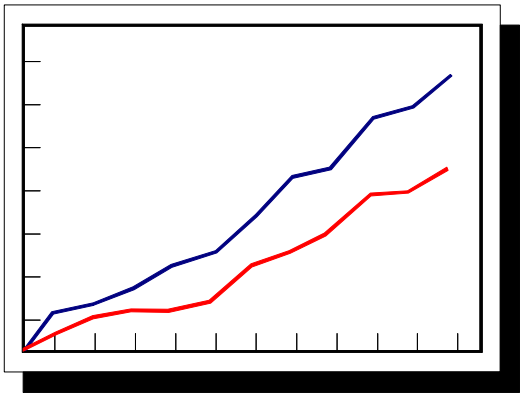
- Has any sewer rehabilitation work been done in the past 15 years?

- How many sanitary sewer overflows have occurred in the last year?

- Is there a record?

✔ *Water Quality Monitoring*

Monitoring streams in the service areas can help identify problems in the collection system such as leaking pipes, washed-out stream crossings, and other pollution sources which could be attributed to the sewer system. Fecal Coliform is a common parameter monitored to detect potential contamination from sewers.



- ! Is there a water quality monitoring program in the service areas?
- ! If so, what parameters are monitored and at what frequency?
- ! How many locations are monitored?

✔ *Management Information Systems*

A management information system uses data from work reports prepared by field personnel to optimize the operation and maintenance of the collection system. A powerful tool, the information system is used as an aide to schedule preventive and reactive work on the system. It can also be used to measure efficiency, and track and develop costs.

- ! What types of work reports are prepared by the field personnel?

  Examples include:
  - Main Sewer Construction
  - Main Sewer Maintenance
  - Main Sewer Repair
  - Structure Maintenance
  - Structure Repair or Abandonment
  - Building Sewer Maintenance
  - Building Sewer Repair

- ! Do the work reports include complete and useful information?
- ! How are records kept?
- ! Does the facility use computer software to manage information? If so, what type of systems are used?

! What kind of management reports are generated from the work report data?

Examples include:
- Payroll
- Production
- Work Costs
- System Inventory
- Main line maintenance history
- Service line maintenance history
- Main and service line repair history

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators are used to determine the condition of the system. These indicators are not absolute because there may be other reasons to suggest a less than adequate system condition. However, if several of the factors indicate possible problems, further investigation is warranted.

! What is the per capita wastewater flow for the maximum month, week, and day?

EPA considers Infiltration/Inflow (I/I) to be excessive if the total daily flow during periods of high groundwater exceeds 120 gallons per capita per day (gpcd), and during a storm event exceeds 275 gpcd.

! What is average annual BOD of the treatment facility influent?

An average of much less than 200 mg/L may indicate excessive I/I.

! What is the ratio of maximum wet weather flow to average dry weather flow?

A review of 10 case studies by EPA found that peak wet weather flow ranged from 3.5 to 20 times the average dry weather flow. Typically, as the ratio approaches 4 to 5, the likelihood of surcharge and overflow increases.

! What is the annual number of overflows, and what are the causes (i.e., grease blockages, debris blockages, pump malfunctions, overloaded sewers, lift station power loss, etc.)?

! What is the annual number of sewer cave-ins? What were the causes (i.e., pipe corrosion, root intrusion, leaks, etc.)

✔ *Complaints*

- ! How are public complaints handled?
- ! What are the common complaints received?
- ! How often are these complaints reported?
- ! Is there a record?
- ! Does the utility have a procedure in place to evaluate and respond to complaints?

✔ *Public Relations*

- ! Is there a public relations program in place?
- ! Are the employees of the utility trained in public relations?
- ! What type of public notification is given for treatment plant upsets or collection system overflows?
- ! Is the public notified prior to major construction or maintenance work?
- ! How often does the utility communicate with other municipal departments?

✔ *Emergency Maintenance and/or Contingency Plans*

- ! Does the utility have a written emergency maintenance plan?
- ! What type of equipment does the utility have available for emergency maintenance? How quickly can the utility access that equipment in case of an emergency?

✔ *Spare Parts Inventory Management*

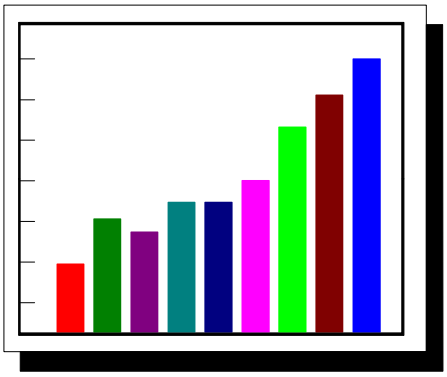
- ! Does the utility have a central location for the storage of spare parts?
- ! Have spare parts which are difficult to obtain, but critical to operation been identified?
- ! Does the utility maintain a stock of common spare parts on its maintenance vehicles?

- ! What methods are employed to keep track of the location, usage, and reordering of spare parts? Are parts logged out when taken by maintenance personnel for use?
- ! Does the utility salvage specific equipment parts when equipment is placed out of service and not replaced?
- ! How often does the utility conduct a check of the inventory of parts to ensure their tracking system is working?
- ! Who has the responsibility to track the inventory?

Operation and Maintenance

The operation and maintenance (O&M) of a wastewater collection system is a difficult undertaking. Besides keeping the system in good working order, a proper O&M program should convey all wastewater to the treatment plant. A well-operated system will employ many, if not all, of the techniques described in this section.

✔ *Maintenance Scheduling*



- ! Does the utility schedule its maintenance activities?
- ! How are priorities determined?
- ! How is the effectiveness of the maintenance schedule measured?

✔ *Sewer Cleaning*

Sewer utilities have been cleaning lines for a long time. Most sewer cleaning programs have been directed towards emergency situations which occur due to stoppages. A better O&M program will have regular cleaning schedules for the system.

- ! Is there a routine schedule established for cleaning sewer lines on a system-wide basis (e.g., “once every seven to twelve years,” or “between 8% and 14% per year” ?

- Is there a process present to identify sewer line segments that have chronic problems and that should be cleaned on a more frequent schedule?

Cleaning Equipment

Mechanical cleaning equipment, such as a rodding device or bucket machine, has been the mainstay of utility cleaning operations for a long time. Though this type of equipment is still in use, hydraulic cleaning equipment which uses water pressure directed through a nozzle has generally replaced the need for mechanical equipment.

- What type of cleaning equipment does the sewer utility use?
- How many cleaning units of each type does the utility have?
- How many cleaning crews and shifts does the utility employ?
- How many cleaning crews are dedicated to routine cleaning?
- How many cleaning crews are dedicated to emergency cleaning?
- What has the utility's experience been regarding pipe damage caused by mechanical cleaning equipment?
- Where is the cleaning equipment stationed?

Chemical Cleaning and Root Removal

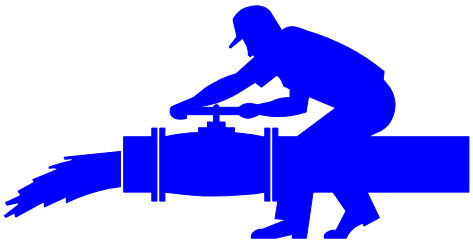
Roots are a major cause of stoppages in many systems, so root removal and control is an important utility operation.

- Does the utility have a root control program?
- Are chemical cleaners used? What types?
- How often are they applied?
- How are the chemical cleaners applied?
- What results are achieved through the use of chemical cleaners?

✔ *Hydrogen Sulfide Monitoring and Control*

The presence of hydrogen sulfide gas in gravity and pressure sewer lines can, and often does, lead to serious and catastrophic corrosion of concrete pipes and the metallic components of sewer systems. Hydrogen sulfide corrosion is usually a problem in areas having little topographic relief where there may be long travel times. Hydrogen sulfide corrosion can also be a problem downstream from pump stations having long wet well holding times.

- ! Are odors a frequent source of complaints?
- ! Has the sewer utility verified the existence/non-existence of a hydrogen sulfide problem, and if one is present, does it have in place corrosion control programs?
- ! What are the major elements of the utility's program?



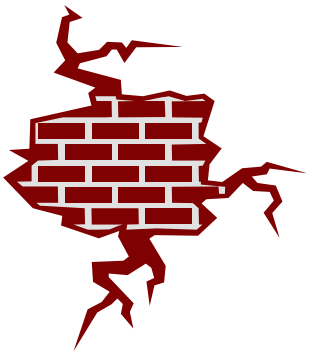
A control program could be use of chemicals or aeration to prevent the formation of hydrogen sulfide. Pipe materials which resists corrosion are also effective. Often, a combination of approaches will be included in a program.

✔ *Lift Stations*

Lift stations are an important part of most wastewater systems. In coastal or other areas with little topographical relief , lift stations are a major O&M item. The effects of deteriorated collection systems are often realized at lift stations in the form of severe overflows during rain events.

Operation

- ! How many personnel are detailed to pump station operations and maintenance?
- ! Are these personnel assigned full-time or part-time to pump station duties?
- ! Is there sufficient redundancy of equipment?



Emergencies

- ! Who responds to lift station overflows? How are they notified?

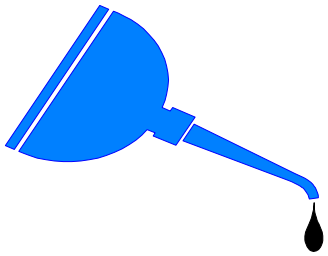
- How is loss of power at a station dealt with? (e.g., on-site electrical generators, alternate power source, portable electric generators)

Alarms and Monitoring

- How are lift stations monitored?

The answer to this question will depend on the station size, and the size and complexity of the system. In many systems, audible alarms or flashing lights are used to indicate a problem at the station. Reliance is placed on either the local populace or law enforcement to notice and report an alarm. In more modernized systems, alarm conditions are remotely monitored at a central location. This is particularly true for the larger stations. These SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) systems allow for real-time control, monitoring, and record keeping from remote locations.

Inspection



- How often are lift stations visited?
- What is inspected during these visits?
- Is there a checklist?

Preventative and Routine Maintenance

- Is there a preventive maintenance program for lift station equipment, and if so, what is involved in this program?
- Is an adequate parts inventory maintained for all equipment?
- Is there a sufficient number of trained personnel to properly maintain all stations?

Record keeping

- Are O&M logs maintained for all pump stations?

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- Are manufacturer's specifications and equipment manuals available for all equipment?
- Are run-times or ampere readings recorded for all pumps? How is this information used to assess performance?

Force Mains and Air Release/Vacuum Valves

Force mains and air release/vacuum valves are an integral part of the transmission system. Force mains receive the lift station effluent and convey it to the gravity system or the treatment plant. Air release/vacuum valves are installed at the high points of the force main.

The route of force mains should be inspected regularly in order to determine if any leaks are present. This is particularly true where the route is through remote areas. Air release/vacuum valves should be identified and receive regular documented maintenance. Malfunctions of these valves can lead to overflows and/or a reduced hydraulic capacity of the force main.

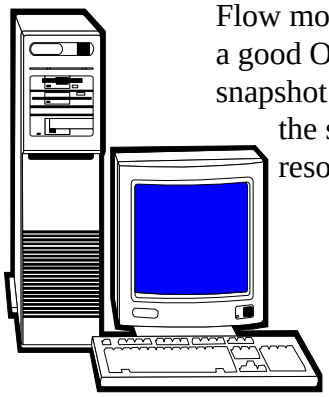
- ! Does the utility schedule and conduct inspections of force main routes?

- ! Does the utility have a scheduled maintenance/inspection program for air release/vacuum valves?

✔ *Sewer System Evaluation*

As discussed in the Management section, many of the techniques in use for SSES work should be a part of a utility's operation and maintenance program. Larger utilities can justify the purchase of much of the equipment used in this effort.

Flow Monitoring



Flow monitoring data collection and evaluation should be an important part of a good O&M program. A well-designed flow monitoring program will give a snapshot of the current condition of the system. By isolating the portions of the system that are making the greatest contribution to the problem, resources can be directed where they will be of greatest benefit.

Techniques used to monitor flow include continuous metering, nighttime field measurements, quantification of pump run-times, and flow measurements taken at the treatment plant. Continuous flow measurement at key locations throughout the collection system will give the most accurate indication of system integrity. The other techniques have been used to some advantage with smaller systems.

Use of meters which measure depth of flow and velocity will allow accurate results, even under surcharged conditions. Meters are available which allow continuous data recording

which can either be downloaded locally or transmitted to a remote location. Coupled with appropriate software, this is a powerful tool for sewer system evaluation.

- Does the utility have a flow monitoring program? If so, what methods are used?

Manhole Inspection

Inspecting manholes is an important part of any maintenance program. Often utilities are unaware of the location of many of their manholes. This is unfortunate since manholes are an important source of I/I and are good indicators of problems in the system. Missing manhole lids and offset manhole cones are often the result of sewer overflows. Debris on manhole steps or high waterlines indicate the presence of surcharged conditions.

Some utilities use manhole inserts to reduce inflow to the system. A manhole insert is a small, tub-shaped plastic device installed at the top of the manhole and held in position by the manhole lid. Its purpose is to catch water that enters the manhole via holes in the lid or via the access pick holes.

- Does the utility have a routine manhole inspection program?

- Is there a data management system for documenting and tracking manhole inspection activities?

- What triggers whether a manhole needs rehabilitation?

Sewer Cleaning Related to I/I Reduction

- Are sewers cleaned prior to flow monitoring?

- Are sewers cleaned prior to televised inspection?

Televised Inspection

Inspecting sewers using closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras is a powerful tool for I/I reduction. Leaking joints or punctures can be easily detected and often repaired at the time of inspection. CCTV is also a good method to inspect the integrity of new construction before the warranty expires.

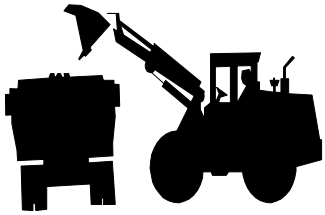
- Does the utility use televised inspection? If so, in what context?

Smoke Testing and Dyed Water Flooding

These techniques are useful to locate defects in the system and illegal connections.

- ! Does the utility use smoke testing to identify sources of inflow into the system?
- ! Does the utility use dyed water flooding to identify suspected sources (indirect connections) of inflow into the system when smoke testing yields inconclusive results?
- ! Is there a data management system for tracking these activities?
- ! Is there a document that describes the procedures that the utility follows? Are there any standard forms?

✔ *Rehabilitation*



Several techniques are available for sewer rehabilitation. A determination of the best techniques to apply to a particular situation should be made following the SSES and an economic analysis comparing the different options.

Main Line Repairs

Point and Replacement Repairs

Point repairs consist of repairing cracked, corroded, or broken gravity sewers and force mains. This work typically includes excavation to the location of the break, removal of the broken pipe section(s) and replacement with new pipe.

Joint Testing and Grouting

Joint testing and grouting are done on sewer line sections with leaking joints but no structural defects. This work can be done in conjunction with the routine televising of lines. Grouting has a limited life and must be repeated every 5-10 years.

Sewer Lining

Sewer lining is a technique which returns pipe to new condition. Many of the current systems can be used where pipe is structurally deficient. Due to the limited excavation required for these techniques, they are good choices where surface construction would cause much disruption.

- ! What type of main line repairs has the utility used in the past?
- ! Does the utility currently use any of above techniques for main line repairs?

Manhole Repairs

Manhole repairs consist of repairing structural defects or leakage in individual manholes and castings. The structural repair work may include:

- Complete manhole replacement
- Replacing castings (lid and frame)
- Replacing defective adjusting rings or top segments
- Spray relining the existing manhole
- Grouting fissures to eliminate leakage

! What rehabilitation techniques are used for manhole repairs?

! What type of documentation is kept?

✔ *Service Laterals*

Service laterals can often be the largest source of I/I to a system. Taps, joints, and locations of structural damage are common points where I/I may be introduced into the collection system. Most utilities have legally established what part(s) of the service lateral they maintain. Jurisdiction may cover the tap only, cover all construction to the property line, or cover construction all the way to the building. The utility itself may not have direct control over installation of new service laterals. Typically the municipality's building inspectors have this responsibility. What is important is that there is communication and a consistency of standards between the utility and building departments.

! To what degree does the utility have responsibility for service laterals?

! Does the utility have a written procedure for the approval and inspection of new construction service laterals?

! Does the utility require service laterals to meet certain standards of construction? How are these standards made available to builders?

! Does the utility have a procedure to actively find and remove illegal tap-ins?

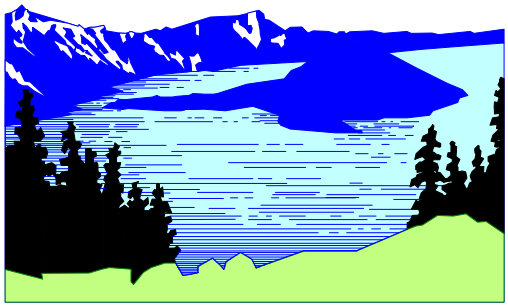
! What is the utility's jurisdiction related to repair/replacement of service laterals?

! Does the utility include I/I originating from service laterals as part of their system evaluations?

✔ *Alternative Collection Systems*

Alternative collection systems differ significantly from the conventional gravity sewer commonly employed to convey wastewater. Alternative systems include: grinder pump pressure systems, septic tank effluent pump (STEP) systems, small diameter gravity systems, and vacuum collection systems. Each system has its own unique operation and maintenance requirements and could be found as a subset of a system which is predominately gravity sewer or by itself as a stand-alone utility.

Although each alternative system operates differently and has different maintenance requirements, all require a similar management system. In each system appurtenances are located at each residence, so the utility needs to have ready access, maintain adequate spare parts, and install alarm systems to notify the utility of any problems between inspections.



Grinder Pump Systems

Grinder systems employ a holding tank (typically up to 100 gallons and located near an individual residence) which houses a small pump with a grinder attached. Wastewater is discharged intermittently using float controls. The collection system is comprised mostly of 1½" and 2" PVC plastic lines. Manholes are generally not installed, but cleanouts should be installed at the ends of all lines and at critical points. Air release valves are installed at the downstream side of high points. Pressures are low.

A system serving 500 homes would include 500 individual pump stations so a utility needs to have an appropriate staffing level for maintenance. A minimum of two personnel should be available. Generally speaking, a staff including two full-time employees per 1,000 stations has been found sufficient for well-designed systems.

Major sources of emergency maintenance include electrical problems and grease buildup in the holding tanks, resulting in failure of the floats to activate the pumps. Corrosion within the holding tank can also be a problem. Grinding solids reduces the likelihood of solids deposition, but hydrogen sulfide may be a problem where the pressure line discharges to the treatment plant or into a gravity collection system.

Pump preventive maintenance is critical and adequate spare pumps should be in inventory. Pumps and grinders may require frequent replacement and overhaul. Pump life is limited and a plan to replace all pumps should be in place. Infiltration is generally not a problem, but exfiltration may occur through deteriorated joints.

Septic Tank Effluent Pump Systems

STEP systems are similar to the grinder pump system except a septic tank replaces the holding tank and grinders are not present on the pumps. A greater range in pump types (centrifugal, progressive cavity, etc.) are common with these systems. Although the septic tank provides preliminary treatment and solids settlement, it is part of the collection system.

Significant infiltration may occur with poorly sealed and constructed septic tanks. Lines are generally sized assuming low infiltration rates. High infiltration rates will increase pump operation and may reduce pump life.

The wastewater is highly septic and can cause odor and corrosion problems where the pressure line discharges into a conventional manhole or treatment works. Proper operation and maintenance of the septic tank is essential for proper function of the collection system, so tanks should be pumped out on a set schedule.

Small Diameter Gravity Sewers

Like STEP systems, small diameter gravity systems use septic tanks for preliminary treatment and solids removal. However, no pumps are used. The septic tank overflows into a small diameter (4" and up) pipe placed at a moderate grade. The lower solids concentration in the wastewater results in less deposition of solids in the pipe.

Cleanouts are generally used in place of manholes, and pipes are sized assuming low infiltration rates. Similar to the STEP system, the integrity and maintenance of the septic tank is a critical factor for proper operation.

Vacuum Sewer Systems

Vacuum systems have a central vacuum station which includes vacuum pumps, holding tanks, and pressure pumps. The vacuum pumps provide a continuous suction in the collection line. A holding tank and vacuum valve are installed near each residence.

When the wastewater reaches a set level in the holding tank, the valve is opened to release a slug of liquid into the collection line. A loss of vacuum in the system will generally trigger a fault condition. Major breaks may cause the system to shut down, and leaks are difficult to locate. Once the wastewater arrives at a central vacuum station, it enters a holding tank and is pumped to the treatment facility through a force main.

- Does the utility have control of the near-residence portions of the collection system?
- Who owns the near-residence systems?
- Does the utility do periodic inspections of the near-residence facilities?
- What is the frequency of these inspections?
- Are pressure check valves installed on pumps?
- Are clean-outs installed at the end of each branch line?
- Is a pipe locating system installed?
- Are air release valves installed on the downstream side of high points?
- Does the system have a warning alarm system at each residence?
- How does the utility respond to the alarm system?
- Are odor control systems are installed?