MAY 2024

CURRENTS

Recognizing the history and future of our sewer and stormwater system

Next Board Meeting: May 24

For more information and to join a PWSA Board Meeting, please visit pgh2o.com/board

For a complete list of PWSA's community meetings and events, please visit pgh2o.com/events-meetings.

A retention tank at our Centre and Herron Green Infrastructure project detains stormwater and reduces the amount of water entering pipes.

Our current sewer system was designed for a different time — one marked by different attitudes about transporting and managing wastewater.

Pittsburgh's First Sewers

Pittsburgh's first public sewer lines were built as early as 1840 in present-day Shadyside and Oakland. These lines discharged stormwater and wastewater into the Monongahela River. This practice continued through the first part of the 20th century providing a quick way to move increasing amounts of sewage away from homes and businesses in populated areas.

Today's Combined Sewer System and Treatment

Most of the sewer system in Pittsburgh is known as a combined sewer system that funnels wastewater and stormwater into the same pipe. Today, stormwater and wastewater flow through one pipe and are directed to ALCOSAN where it is treated and released into the Ohio River to serve downstream communities. During dry weather, this system is effective, but with increasing and heavy rain, the old pipes are often overwhelmed, and excess wastewater and stormwater can overflow into rivers and streams.

What lead to this design?

When first constructed and before the dawn of environmental protections, relying on a single pipe to carry both sewage and stormwater to the river saved money and was faster to install than two pipes that would carry wastewater and stormwater separately.[1]

Many of Pittsburgh's sewers were built before the treatment plants that clean wastewater. In fact, it wasn't until the 1950s that the city began building structures inside our sewers to redirect sewage away from the rivers and to ALCOSAN for treatment.[2] While our rivers began faring much better with these improvements, about 75% of our sewer system remains a combined sewer system and wet weather overflows of wastewater can still occur.

Looking to the Future

As protectors of public health and the environment, the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) is modernizing our infrastructure and educating customers about stormwater management. Here's a snapshot of the improvements we are making to our sewer and stormwater systems.

We are using modern sewer lining techniques to rehabilitate aging sewer mains. This helps to strengthen and extend the useful life of our sewer system. Additionally, the construction of new stormwater infrastructure such as modern storage tanks, retention basins, and green infrastructure slows the flow of stormwater into our system, reduces basement backups, and improves water quality in rivers and streams.

Sewer separation projects, like the one in the South Side Flats, will direct stormwater and wastewater into separate pipes. This approach also helps to alleviate basement backups and neighborhood flooding while reducing sewage and pollution from entering our rivers and streams.

As we move forward, PWSA is committed to improving our existing sewer system, protecting the quality of water in our rivers and streams and creating a cleaner, healthier community.

More information about our sewer system and stormwater management is available at pgh2o.com/sewers and pgh2o.com/stormwater.

1. History: 3 Rivers Wet Weather. https://www.3riverswetweather.org/about-wet-weather-issue/understanding-sewer-collection-system/history. Accessed: March 24, 2024.

2. Robust Stormwater Management in the Pittsburgh Region. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1600/RR1673/RAND_RR1673.pdf. Accessed: March 28, 2024.

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Additional Stormwater Resources

Explore the resources below for additional information about the stormwater fee, the stormwater credit program, and a searchable map to understand the amount of hard surface on your property.

Stormwater Credit Program: Property owners choosing to manage stormwater on site may reduce their monthly stormwater charge by installing stormwater management systems such as a rain garden or an underground stormwater system on their property. For information about the stormwater credit and to apply visit pgh2o.com/stormwater-fee.

Fee Finder Website: Use our searchable map to view the amount of impervious surface on your property and understand your stormwater fee. To use the site:

- Launch the Fee Finder Website
- Enter your address in the search bar and press enter
- Click inside the boundaries of your property for the amount of impervious surface and Equivalent Residential Units (ERU's)
- To determine your fee amount, multiply the number of ERU's by the current stormwater rate and subtract any credits that may apply

Disputing Stormwater Fee: If you have questions about the amount of impervious surface calculated for your property or believe there is a discrepancy, please contact our Customer Service department by calling 412-255-2423 (Press 5), to start the process.

Questions: Please call PWSA Customer Service at 412-255-2423 (Press 5) or email info@pgh2o.com for questions about the stormwater fee or general questions about the credit program. For more information about our plans to manage stormwater, please visit pgh2o.com/stormwater.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Your donation to PWSA's Hardship Grant Program will directly benefit PWSA customers having difficulty paying their bill. Donate online at pgh2o.com/give.

Enroll in eBilling

Convenient and easy to use, our online billing and payment portal ensures timely delivery of bills and payments. Visit pgh2o.com/ebilling to enroll.

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Customer Service*
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info@pgh2o.com
*translation services available

Emergency Dispatch*
412.255.2423 (Press 1)
Available 24/7

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PGH2O WATER WISE

Spring Cleaning for Green Infrastructure

If you have green infrastructure on your property, follow these deep-cleaning tips to prepare for spring rains.

Green infrastructure – like rain gardens, rain barrels, and permeable pavers – mimic nature to capture, store, and filter stormwater and help protect the environment. Many property owners in Pittsburgh have installed green solutions to reduce stormwater runoff from their roofs, driveways, or parking lots.

If you have green infrastructure on your property, follow these deep-cleaning tips to prepare for spring rains:

- Remove any trash leaves, sediment, weeds, or invasive plants. Be sure to also remove dead stalks or spent flower blooms on perennial plants and replace any dead plants.
- Inspect soil and mulch depth and quality and replace if necessary.
- Check stormwater inlets and outlets, and repair or replace if necessary.
- Inspect and clean rain barrel tanks and fittings.
- If you have a downspout diverter, switch it over to route water to the rain barrel.