

City of Olean
Office of the Plumbing Inspector

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Notice to Residents on Storm Water Disconnects

Dear Resident:

In response to an Order imposed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the City of Olean is implementing a program for removal of “illegal” connections to the sanitary sewer system.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) will begin inspecting the sanitary sewer system. As unauthorized and illegal connections are identified, property and building owners will be notified. Elimination of this flow from the sanitary sewer system will be required.

The City will begin enforcing removal of “illegal” connections to the sanitary sewer system. **The Olean City Code will provide penalties for the failure to comply with a notice to disconnect an illegal connection.** The City expects there will be a high rate of voluntary compliance with this inspection program as the goal is to reduce wastewater treatment costs and improve the quality of our wastewater treatment plant discharge.

Included here are answers to the questions typically asked about the program:

What is a sanitary sewer?

A sanitary sewer is a pipe located in the City right-of-way that is designed solely to transport wastewater from sanitary fixtures in your house or place of business to the City’s Wastewater Treatment Plant. Sanitary sewers in your neighborhood are owned by the City of Olean.

What is a storm sewer?

A storm sewer is a pipe located in the City right-of-way that is designed to carry storm related water runoff. Storm sewers are normally much larger than sanitary sewers because they are designed to carry much larger amounts of flow. Storm sewers are owned, operated and maintained by the City of Olean.

What is an illegal connection?

An illegal connection is a connection that permits extraneous storm related water (water from sources other than sanitary fixtures) to enter the sanitary sewer system. The extraneous storm related water is water that should be going to the storm sewer or allowed to soak into the ground without entering the sanitary sewer.

What are the different types of illegal connections?

Illegal connections include connections of roof downspouts, sump pumps, footing/foundation drains and basement drains to the house sanitary sewer lines. In addition, defective house sanitary sewer lines cause extraneous water to enter the sanitary sewers and thus they are also illegal connections.

Where should storm drainage from downspouts, sump pumps and /or other drain appurtenance be directed if it cannot be discharged to the sanitary sewer?

Modern subdivision construction standards generally call for water from sump pump, area drains and the like to be diverted to the storm sewers, front or back yards or above ground drainage ditches.

Why is it important for everyone to remove illegal connections?

Removal of illegal connections will significantly reduce the flow of extraneous storm related water in the sanitary sewer system. This storm water ends up at the wastewater treatment plant and is treated along with sanitary flow. If the City and its residents can reduce the amount of storm water in the treatment plant, the costs of operating the plant can be significantly reduced.

How can surcharged sanitary sewers cause basement flooding?

A surcharged sewer flows at a level greater than the “normal” level. If the home has sanitary fixtures or floor drains at an elevation below the surcharge level, basement flooding can occur. The sanitary sewers have been designed to transfer sanitary waste only. Extraneous storm water flow added to the normal sanitary flow can exceed the capacity of the sanitary sewer resulting in a situation where the sanitary sewer is “surcharged”. Basically, surcharging occurs when the amount of flow trying to get through a pipe exceeds the maximum capacity of the pipe thus building up pressure in the sanitary services and filling basements and crawlspaces. Reducing the extraneous flow will reduce the surcharging and sewer back-ups.

Do illegal connections really contribute large amounts of extraneous water to the sanitary sewer system?

Yes. For example, a typical eight-inch sanitary sewer can handle domestic sewage from up to 225 homes; however, it takes only five sump pumps operating at full capacity to overload an eight-inch sanitary sewer.

How does the City of Olean identify illegal connection?

The City owns sewer-televising equipment, conducts smoke and dye testing of the sewers and house lines and makes house inspections.

I've never had basement flooding due to surcharge sewer. Why should I remove my illegal connections?

You may not have basement flooding due to surcharged sewers. But if your plumbing pumps or drains storm related water into the sanitary sewer, it may well be the cause of flooding in your neighbor's basement.

Is the requirement to remove illegal connections unique to Olean?

No. In response to the regulations of the DEC, local governments have adopted ordinances or codes prohibiting the intrusion of extraneous storm related water into sanitary sewers.