



ALABAMA MUNICIPAL INSURANCE CORPORATION MUNICIPAL WORKERS COMPENSATION FUND, INC.



Loss Control Division

PREVENTING SEWER BACKUPS: A CHECKLIST FOR PUBLIC WORKS MANAGERS

OVERVIEW

To the public, efficiently managing runoff during storms proves the municipality's responsiveness to its concerns about property damage from storm water as well as sewer backups and overflows. Nevertheless, many municipalities have experienced storm water problems and sewer backups over the past few years. While some of these events resulted from atypically excessive runoff during heavy storms, many of them resulted from degrading sewer systems and inadequate maintenance.

In some municipalities, these sewer backups have caused significant property damage and have led to legal action against the municipality by its citizens. In some cases, where the sewer backups and flooding problems have been traceable to the entity's negligent operation of the systems, the courts have denied governmental immunity and required the municipality to pay damages.

To defend against such claims, it is important for municipalities to have documented plans in place for maintaining their storm water system. In most communities, the Department of Public Works is responsible for this important task. The department or utility assures proper drainage through monitoring, maintenance and related activities.

THE CHECKLIST

To reduce the risk of litigation, the municipality should develop a formal sewer cleaning and inspection program that documents planned inspection routes and completion dates. The program should include:

- A routine maintenance program. Maintenance programs should address sources of infiltration and inflow. The program should address every area in your community and problem areas more frequently.
- The visual monitoring of lines with TV cameras on a regular, routine schedule.
- A process for documenting and tracking reported incidents to assure that problems receive prompt correction.
- For systems known to have problems with infiltration and inflow, a process for monitoring and gauging rainfall should be established so pump stations and basins have adequate staffing and monitoring during periods of heavy rainfall.
- A requirement that all restaurants and laundromats install grease traps. This requirement should apply to all new repaired connections.

- A requirement that repairs or improvements use asbestos cement pipe or other similar durable materials.
- A requirement that wastewater employees meet all state and federal qualifications for licensing and should receive regular updated training.

The greatest operational challenge of wastewater treatment is assuring that collection pipes carry wastewater to the treatment plant without allowing any flows into natural waters and without causing sewer backups on private property. A municipality that experiences complaints of sewer backups should investigate them promptly and fully to determine the cause. An overloaded sanitary sewer needs relief or another sewer to increase capacity and eliminate illegal and non-permitted discharges. If a sewer system leaks or accepts too much groundwater infiltration or too much storm water runoff, it may need extensive repairs or upgrades. If the system suffers from deterioration, the municipality may need to replace it. Ongoing maintenance is necessary to preserve the integrity of the sewer system. Maintenance includes:

- Cleaning;
- Testing connections and making repairs where necessary; and
- Preventing damage to the system from the roots of nearby trees and other vegetation

Finally, a policy statement is an important element of the storm water management program: The policy statement should cover how the municipality will deal with storms of varying magnitudes, the levels of protection it will provide, and how it will address storm water quality. In addition, the policy should state the municipality's commitment to reducing potential environmental problems through measures that control pollution, erosion, and other problems produced when no management exists.

STATE FUNDING RESOURCES

The following Alabama state agencies have financial resource programs available for municipalities and other public entities:

Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

Contact: Mr. Shabbir Olia - (334) 242-5468

The Community Development Block Grant Program is a federal program by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The state of Alabama receives a yearly block of approximately \$30 million to be used: within the 4 categories of projects.

- 1) Competitive Fund - This block is granted amongst several projects, including water and sewer improvements. Grant application is a once a year with the maximum grant amount of \$500,000.
- 2) Economic Development Fund - Provides grants based on industry development in cities and counties. Grant applications taken year round.
- 3) Special Fund- Provides grants based on special needs such as health issues. Grant applications taken throughout the year.
- 4) Community Enhancement Fund – Provides grants based on quality of life considerations. Grant applications taken once a year.

Information regarding the Block Grant program may be accessed at www.adeca.alabama.gov under the Office of the Director.

Alabama Department of Environmental

Contact: Aubrey White - (334) 271-7805

ADEM administers two low interest loan programs available to finance infrastructure improvements.

1) Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) -Sewer and wastewater projects, i.e. sewers rehabs

2) Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) –Drinking water projects not intended to serve growth.

The approval process for these loans takes about a year to obtain money from the loan. A pre-application must be submitted by the end of the year. Those projects selected for funding must submit a full application by the following May 1 with dispersal of the funds in December of each year. A brochure explaining the program and an application form are available at www.adem.state.al.us.

Alabama USDA Rural Developments

Contact: Area I Huntsville (256) 544-5795
Area II Dothan (334) 793-7819
Area III Tuscaloosa (205) 553-1733
Area IV Bay Minette (251) 937-7350

Federal loans and grants are available for drinking water, sanitary sewer, as well as solid waste and storm drainage facilities for expansion of new services in rural cities and towns of 10,000 or less. These funds are made available through the Water and Environmental Programs of the Alabama USDA Rural Development. Applications are received year round. Information about the program is available at the USDA website www.usda.gov/rus/water/ or by calling the state office in Montgomery at 1-334-279-3400.

INFORMATIONAL RESOURCES

A wealth of information is available to assist municipalities in developing an effective program for storm water management.

Alabama Rural Water Association, 1-334-396-5511, www.alruralwater.com

Alabama Department of Environmental Management, 1-334-271-7812,
www.adem.state.al.us.com

NPDES Support and Technical Assistance Branch, WN-16J, Water Division, US EPA, Region 5
77 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago Illinois 60604-3590

EPA website at www.epa.gov. Catalog of EPA publications. Abstracts of articles, and information on free training and funding, Office of Wastewater Management at www.epa.gov/owm.

American Public Works Association, Urban Storm Water Management (Special Report No. 49) provides a discussion of the subject by public works managers from over forty municipal agencies.

American Public Works Association, Public Works Management Practices Manual (3rd Edition, 1998) provides guidance on developing effective policies for the public works department.

Both books are available from the American Public Works Association, 1313 East Sixtieth Street, Chicago, IL or at the association's website: www.apwa.org.

Cristafano, ed., Management of Local Public Work (A joint publication of the International City Management Association (ICMA) and the American Public Works Association, 1986). The book is available from ICMA in Washington DC or you can visit the organization's website at www.icma.org.

If you have any questions or if we can help you with other areas of risk management please contact us.

Alabama League of Municipalities/AMIC 1-334-262-2566

<p>NOTE: This document is not intended to be legal advice. It does not identify all the issues surrounding the particular topic. Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert or an attorney who is knowledgeable about the topic. Reliance on this information is at the sole risk of the user.¹</p>
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