

Yes, Your Sewer Bill Is Increasing – Here's Why

In the 1950s, the Pittsburgh region had the highest disease rate in the United States resulting in the building of regional sewer systems and the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) treatment plant to handle sewer overflows. Overflows occur during rainy weather when storm water runs into sanitary sewers. The system cannot handle the overflow and then that wastewater is deposited directly into the river. Although ALCOSAN has done an excellent job treating overflows it is time to do more to reduce them.

Today Allegheny County is more populated than it was in the 1950s which results in more wastewater. A 2004 Consent Decree was signed by ALCOSAN with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Allegheny County Health Department that requires increased monitoring to stop rainy weather sewer overflows into the rivers. This then led to a Consent Order which calls on municipalities in Allegheny County including Upper St. Clair to examine their sewer systems to determine ways to reduce or eliminate overflows. In late March 2015, an extension was granted to the Consent Decree allowing more time for ALCOSAN to meet goals of the Decree. Then in turn has given individual municipalities additional time to meet goals of their Consent Order.

Upper St. Clair has been active in undertaking the tasks required under the Consent Order including mapping of the sanitary sewer collection systems, inspecting manholes, cleaning and televising the system, and administering dye tests. A dye test, which is required any time a property is being sold, tests that downspouts and driveway drains are not tied into the sanitary sewers since they are not for storm water and can cause flooding. If illegal connections are discovered, they are removed from the system.

As with any infrastructure improvements, this means additional monies are required. In this case, higher sewer bills for all of our residents and business owners is the result. ALCOSAN raised rates by 17% in 2014 and will increase rates by 11% for each of the next three years, effective January 1 of each year, to help pay for the federally mandated Consent Order project. As all communities under ALCOSAN work to reduce wastewater the financial burden will be felt by everyone.

For a more detailed description of the sewer system, refer to the [Spring 2014](#), [Summer 2014](#), and [Winter 2014](#) issues of Upper St. Clair TODAY to read “Sewers 101” an excellent series by Ruthann L. Omer, P.E., Township Engineer and President of The Gateway Engineers, Inc.