

Residents blame city for sewer backup

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 24 June 2010 20:38 -

| HEAVY RAINFALL BURDENS WASTEWATER PLANT | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| Gallons per day of water/sewage | | | | |
| Designed average flow | | | | 504,000 |
| Maximum day average | | | | 927,000 |
| Maximum peak flow | | | | 1,870,000 |
| Date | Rainfall* | Flow | Peak Flow | Overunder peak |
| June 11 | 2.8" | 694,000 | 1,870,000 | (986,000) |
| June 12 | 4.9" | 1,225,000 | 1,870,000 | (345,000) |
| June 13 | 2.8" | 2,291,040 | 1,870,000 | 621,040 |
| June 14 | 1.2" | 2,291,040 | 1,870,000 | 621,040 |
| June 15 | 0" | 1,254,000 | 1,870,000 | (616,000) |

* approximate
Source: Bruce Clymer, City of Gothenburg

Officials: Massive rainfall maxes out wastewater treatment plant.

Sewage backup in basements sent unhappy homeowners to Gothenburg's last city council meeting.

Four residents and the father of a property owner attended the June 15 meeting where they asked for answers to the disaster.

The council didn't have any but promised to do what they could to prevent a reoccurrence.

Whether that was possible when nearly 10 inches of rain June 7-14 pummeled the city and pushed groundwater into porous sanitary sewer pipes is the question.

At the meeting, city administrator Bruce Clymer pointed out that the wastewater treatment was designed to handle 1.6 million gallons of water a day.

On the two highest days—June 13 and 14—flow was almost 2.3 million gallons per day.

“Our plant handled what a city with a 23,000 population does each day,” Clymer said. “There was so much our instrumentation couldn't measure it. Our three pumps were running 24 hours a day.”

Sewer water backed up from the plant and started seeping into people's basements June 13

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and 14, generally in an area east of Avenue G, below 12th Street and north of Highway 30.

“Where the sewer backed up, it couldn’t handle all of the water,” Clymer said, noting that many basements throughout the community also flooded from groundwater.

City attorney Mike Bacon explained that the city sewer is not designed to handle such large amounts of rainfall that forced itself into sewer pipes.

The area experienced the same problem two years ago. Council members voted to install a new sewer line and begin a study of the sewer system by the city engineer.

He said the names of residents affected by sewage would be given to the city engineer.

When the study is finished, Clymer said results would be shared at a public hearing.

If Dawson County is declared a disaster because of flood damage, Clymer said there may be government money available.

He advised affected homeowners to document everything for Federal Emergency Management Agency officials.

Pam Buddenberg, who lives with her husband J Buddenberg, 802 11th St., said they can’t keep dealing with sewage in their basement.

“We’ve had one good year after the new sewer pipe went in,” Buddenberg said.

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Buddenberg and others presented a list to the council of 17 homeowners who had problems with sewage.

Delvin Seil, 816 11th Street, said his house and others affected by sewage are devalued.

Tiffany Tiedemann, whose basement at 702 Washington St., filled with 15 inches of sewer water, wondered where her three children could go who have bedrooms in the basement.

Pam Buddenberg said they needed help.

“Someone’s got to look out for us,” she said.

Dave McKim of Maxwell, whose son owns local rental properties with sewage problems, said it wasn’t their fault that the city sewer backed up.

Clymer suggested installing a backwater valve on homes to stop sewage from pushing up through drains but

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