



Southwest Delaware County Municipal Authority

NEWS FROM SWDCMA

January 2016

The decommissioning and demolition of the SWDCMA treatment plant is now complete. The final restoration of the plant grounds will be completed in Spring, 2016.

With this project now behind us, we are moving into 2016 on the road of continued improvement. We would like to take this opportunity to answer some ratepayer questions that have been raised and to provide an explanation of the ongoing operations of the Authority:

Question: Why did SWDCMA decide to stop providing treatment?

Answer: With the Authority facing more stringent restrictions on the discharge of wastewater flows into Chester Creek and the cost of improvements needed to the aging treatment plant in order to meet these updated restrictions, the decision was made at the end of 2009 to transition flows to DELCORA for treatment. Estimates prepared in 2009, projected costs from \$18-\$22 million for the needed plant upgrades to meet the discharge requirements.

Question: What was the cost incurred to transition flows to DELCORA for treatment?

Answer: There were two projects, funded by DELCORA, that included the construction of the force main (the pipe system that handles the wastewater flows from Aston to Chester) and the construction of DELCORA's Chester Ridley Creek Pump Station (the system that pumps the flows from Aston to Chester). Additionally, was the decommissioning and demolition of the SWDCMA treatment plant. The total project cost is expected to be under \$15 million. The debt service for this project will be repaid through treatment cost and is shared proportionately with the Middletown Township Sewer Authority (MTSA) based on metered wastewater flows. This was a much more cost effective approach than trying to complete a plant upgrade, as per the previous question.

Question: What does SWDCMA do now that it no longer provides treatment?

Answer: The Authority owns, operates and maintains the collection system through our contracted service provider, Aqua Resources, Inc. Our collection system consists of 60+ miles of underground pipes, associated pump stations and siphons. The Authority Administration continues to provide billing and collections of our invoices, customer service to our ratepayers and administration of contracted services.

Question: Does DELCORA own SWDCMA?

Answer: No, DELCORA did not purchase the Authority. SWDCMA ceased only the operation of its wastewater treatment plant at the end of 2014. At that time, wastewater flows were sent to DELCORA in Chester, PA for treatment. Since the Authority no longer provides wastewater treatment service, we now pay DELCORA for that service. The SWDCMA continues to operate as an Authority for wastewater collection and processing.

Question: What happened to the MTSA agreement when the transition to DELCORA took place?

Answer: The MTSA agreement ceased to exist as of November 11, 2014, which was when wastewater flows transitioned to DELCORA for treatment. If the Authority had decided not to transition to DELCORA for treatment, the MTSA agreement would have remained in place until 2019.

Question: Since the MTSA agreement is no longer in place, why haven't our bills decreased?

Answer: While we are diligently making every effort to stabilize our rates, the billing rates charged by the Authority are based upon the cost of treatment, the cost of maintaining the collection system, administration costs, debt service and capital improvements. While the MTSA agreement was in effect, a large portion of the billing rate was being used

to subsidize the cost of treatment for Middletown. Unfortunately, this subsidy left limited funds available for capital improvements and major maintenance. While we are no longer burdened by this agreement, we are faced with long overdue pumping station improvements and replacements, siphon improvements and collection system maintenance as required by our regulatory agencies. In addition, the Authority has remaining debt service for the service area expansion of the late 1990's. The rate increases passed since 2012, including the 2% increase for 2016, result in an increase of about \$1.00 per month for the average residential customer.

Question: Why is my billing rate higher than a family member, in a neighboring township, with a similar size home that is also treated by DELCORA?

Answer: There are many factors involved in determining the differences in billing rates between neighboring townships. The first would be just the differences in lifestyles regarding water usage (i.e. laundry, showering, dish washing, etc). The second would be the treatment cost from DELCORA for the townships being compared as there are different rates charged depending on your service area. The third would be the cost of maintenance of the collection systems in the townships being compared. In some surrounding areas, the municipality handles the maintenance of the collection system and the homeowners pay for that cost as part of their property taxes. SWDCMA is responsible for the cost of maintaining the collection system and that is passed onto the rate payers on their quarterly bills as the Sewer Service Flat Rate. These factors, as well as the information provided in the preceding question, all contribute to the difference in billing rates between townships.

Question: If the Authority had decided not to send flows to DELCORA, what effect would there have been on the billing rates?

Answer: If the Authority had opted to make the plant improvements in 2009 rather than transition to DELCORA, funds of \$18-\$22 million dollars would have been needed. Based on the financial condition of the Authority at that time, the opportunity to obtain such financing was not favorable. However, if the Authority was able to obtain the funds, the repayment of such a sizeable debt would have required rates approximately 40-45% higher than what is currently being charged.

Question: Does the Authority have outstanding bonds or loans?

Answer: In 2009, the Authority had a 15 year bond issue for \$15.6 million, which was guaranteed by Aston Township. In June 2015, the Authority took advantage of the option to refund these bonds via a term bank loan which released the Township of their guarantee. This \$9.8 million loan will be repaid in 9 years at a savings of more than \$340,000 over the bond issue.

Question: Is SWDCMA under a moratorium from PA DEP for new connections?

Answer: No, the Authority is not under a moratorium for new connections to the sanitary sewer. However, SWDCMA is under a Connection Management Plan (CMP) from PA DEP. For new connection applicants, this means the Authority must first obtain permission from PA DEP before authorizing any new connections to the sanitary sewer system.

Question: What is the CAP?

Answer: In response to the 2009 Consent Order from PA DEP, a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) was issued to SWDCMA. This plan requires the Authority to make repairs to the collection system to improve its overall efficiency by reducing inflow and infiltration (I&I). One of the annual requirements of the CAP is to report to PA DEP the repairs made to the collection system which have helped reduce I&I.

Question: What is inflow and infiltration (I&I)?

Answer: Inflow is storm water that enters into the collection system from direct connections (i.e. sump pumps and rain gutter downspouts). Infiltration is groundwater that enters into the collection system from cracks and leaks in sanitary sewer pipes, including sewer vents and laterals. Treatment costs can be controlled by minimizing the amount of I&I entering the sanitary sewer.

Question: How can I help reduce I&I?

Answer: Some ways homeowners can contribute to reducing I&I are by disconnecting sump pumps and rain gutter downspouts from the sanitary sewer, make repairs to damaged sewer vents/clean outs, make sure vents are raised 4"-6" above grade and keep your lateral clear of grease build up and roots.

Question: What is a lateral?

Answer: A sewer lateral is the pipe that runs perpendicular from the sewer main into the resident's home. This pipe carries the wastewater from the home into the sanitary sewer which is then taken to DELCORA for treatment.

Question: Does the Authority handle the clearing of my lateral if I have a back up from my vent?

Answer: Since November 2014, the SWDCMA has contracted Aqua Resources, Inc. to operate and maintain our collection system. Homeowner laterals are not part of the Authority's collection system. In the past, the Authority staff would respond to homeowner calls and plunge vents to provide temporary relief to a blocked lateral. That service was above and beyond the Authority's responsibility and is no longer provided through our contractor, Aqua Resources, Inc. Lateral maintenance is the homeowner's responsibility. Lateral maintenance is defined as the clearing of the inside of the lateral pipe all the way to the sewer main, including root growth and grease build-up. If you experience a sewer back up in your home, please call our office at (610) 494-1335 to place a trouble call. If your call is received during working hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.), SWDCMA office staff will handle your call. If the call is received after working hours, please follow the prompt for Trouble Calls. This process will route your call to an Operator who will determine whether a technician will be dispatched to your home or if it will be necessary for you to contact a plumber.

Question: Who is responsible for lateral replacement?

Answer: Depending on what section of the lateral is being replaced, the responsibility can be either the homeowner's or the Authority's. Each situation's circumstances will determine the responsible party.

The majority of our residential customers make their connection to the sewer main in the street. When these customers have a lateral replaced, the homeowner's responsibility is for the section of the pipe that runs from the house to the curb only. The section of the lateral that runs in the street (from the curb to the sewer main) is the responsibility of the Authority with regards to replacement. This section of pipe is replaced by the Authority only when structural damage has occurred to it.

For our residential customers that make their connection to the sewer main in a location other than in the street, the homeowner's lateral responsibility is from the house to the sewer easement. Sewer easement information can be obtained from the Authority when needed.

Question: Is there insurance for sewer back-ups?

Answer: SWDCMA's collection system is over 60 miles of pipe that is anywhere from 20 to 50+ years old. The most common problems found in aging collection systems are tree roots and accumulated grease lining the pipes. No suburban area collection systems are without these problems and no amount of preventive work can eliminate these problems entirely. Unfortunately, on occasion these situations can result in a blockage in the collection system that may result in a sewer backup in your home. SWDCMA encourages our customers to contact your homeowner's insurance carrier and talk to them about the options you may have available for Sewer/Water Backup coverage being added to your homeowner's insurance policy, in case of such an event.

Question: If I refilled my swimming pool after making repairs, do I have to pay for that water to be treated?

Answer: For SWDCMA customers that have swimming pools, the Authority will provide a credit only in the case of initial pool installation and when proof of a repair is provided (i.e. replacement liner, refinishing of pool surface, etc.). If you have made a repair to your pool and need a credit for the additional water used in refilling the pool after repairs are complete, please contact our office at (610) 494-1335 to request an Adjustment Form. The completed form, along with receipts/documentation, should be returned to the address on the form so that an adjustment can be evaluated and a credit applied to your account, if applicable.

Question: Do I have to pay for treatment of the water used through my sprinkler system?

Answer: For SWDCMA customers that have made the investment of landscaping and irrigation systems to their homes, the installation of a deduct meter, or hose bibb meter, may be a cost-effective addition. A deduct meter may be installed, at the homeowner's expense, to meter the water being used for irrigation purposes only as this water never enters the sanitary sewer system. Each quarter you will provide a photo of the meter reading and that water usage is deducted from your quarterly sewer bill. Please contact our office at (610) 494-1335 for further information on deduct meters.

Question: How can I have my tenant receive a copy of the quarterly sewer bill?

Answer: For owners of rental properties, the Authority can send an additional copy of the quarterly invoice to your tenants, if requested. This does not relieve the final responsibility of payment for sewer service from the property owner; but, is provided as a courtesy. The property owner is responsible to provide our office with updates to their tenant information.

Question: If I am selling my home, how do I notify SWDCMA to disconnect my service?

Answer: Sewer service is never disconnected. When you are selling or refinancing your home, have your title company fax a request for a Sewer Certification to SWDCMA. The Authority will provide a statement of all unpaid and unbilled charges owed on the account up through the date of settlement. The funds for these charges will be withheld from the settlement proceeds and then forwarded to the Authority. The title company should forward that payment, along with the new property owners' names, to the Authority. Upon receipt of the payment, the account will be put into the new owners names.

Question: Where and how can I pay my sewer bill?

Answer: Payments can be made via mail, in person at the Authority Administration Building or on our website (www.swdelcoma.org). Accepted methods of payment are cash, check, money order and debit/ credit cards. Customers paying in person should bring their bill with them.

Question: Is there a fee to use a debit or credit card?

Answer: Yes, there is a fee of 2.45% of the amount being paid (\$3.00 minimum) that is charged by the company who processes the debit/credit card transactions.

Question: If I have fallen behind in paying my sewer account, what are my options?

Answer: Residential accounts that have fallen two quarters behind in payments should contact our office to enter into a payment plan. The Authority urges customers to enter into a payment plan before the level of delinquency results in the property being posted for water disconnection.

If you have any additional questions or need further information, please feel free to contact our office at:

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