

Ministry of the Environment

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Ministère de l'Environnement

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March 3, 2010

Ms Neeltje Van Roon, Chair
Mr. Ralph Shore, Environment Liaison Person
Walden-CAN
Main St., Box 4273
Lively, ON P3Y 1N3

Dear Ms Van Roon and Mr. Shore:

Thank you for your letter of February 15, 2010 with regard to your concerns about sewage discharges to surface waters in the Sudbury area. I have been asked to respond to your correspondence on behalf of the Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of the Environment.

It is a ministry priority to ensure municipal sewage treatment facilities are able to meet today's treatment standards and minimize the discharge of untreated wastewater to Ontario's waterways. Sewage overflow outlets are included as a standard engineering practice to prevent human health concerns associated with basement flooding, sewage treatment plant washout or other potential emergencies. Bypasses and overflows often occur as a result of wet weather events, such as heavy rain or rapid spring thaws, where the amount of flow entering a sewage treatment plant exceeds the design capacity of the sewage works. Sewage bypassing is sometimes essential in order to protect the structural integrity and the biological processes that are vital to proper sewage treatment. Bypasses can also occur during dry weather, due to unavoidable circumstances such as power outages, blockages, equipment failures or maintenance. In the Sudbury area, it has been confirmed that 96% of sewage bypasses are due to wet weather events.

Municipalities and operating authorities must routinely report all sewage bypasses and overflows to the ministry. If there is a risk to public health and safety, the local Medical Officer of Health and downstream users, including drinking water plants, First Nations communities and other municipalities, are notified. The ministry's front-line staff conduct routine inspections of all municipal sewage works in the province. In addition, the ministry monitors incidents at sewage facilities and ensures long-term plans are in place to minimize overflows and bypasses.

The ministry continues to promote projects with positive impacts through existing funding programs. Since 2003, the province has provided approximately \$2.8 billion in support for municipal water and wastewater infrastructure through funding and loan programs. In June 2009, the government of Ontario announced over \$70 million in funding for wastewater treatment upgrades in Ontario communities.

Since sewage bypass volumes are inevitably higher in wet years, it is not always meaningful to compare bypass data from one year to another. However, I can assure you that the situation in Sudbury has improved significantly in recent years. In 2008 and 2009 the City of Greater Sudbury spent more than \$50 million of capital improvement funds to address necessary sewer infrastructure upgrades. The City is also working on modifying the Garson sewage lagoon to serve as a storm water retention pond. In case of excess flows, this new component of the sewage collection and treatment system will permit untreated sewage to be held and gradually fed back into the sewage system for treatment after excess flow volumes have subsided.

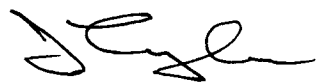
In addition, the City has drafted an updated Sewer Use By-law which will include new provisions to help reduce storm water entry into the sanitary sewer system, and protect the quality of the natural environment. The City's draft by-law was presented to Council this February. There will also be opportunity for interested members of the public like you to find out more and to comment on the draft by-law before it is implemented.

I can assure you that the Ministry of the Environment appreciates the interest and input of efforts of groups like Walden-Community Action Network in highlighting the challenges facing municipal sewage works in the City of Greater Sudbury and across Ontario. In addition, the ministry continues to consider recommendations from the 2009 Ecojustice report in our ongoing efforts to strengthen provincial environmental protection in this area.

Should you have any additional questions regarding this matter, please contact Ms Celeste Dugas, Sudbury Area Supervisor, at (705)564-3278.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the minister's attention.

Sincerely,



John Taylor
Director
Northern Region