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News Release

For Immediate Release

City to Test Sewers Using Smoke

Springfield Clean Water Services, a division of the Department of Environmental Services, is kicking off a major effort to tighten up and repair the City's aging sanitary sewer system. In the next several months, some residents will notice smoke coming from their sanitary sewers. This is part of a testing program to find leaks in the system. The non-toxic, odorless smoke is blown into sewer manholes in the street, goes through the pipes and comes out where there are broken pipes and where roof downspouts, outside area drains, or foundation drains are connected to the sanitary sewers.

Downspouts and outside area and foundation drains should not be connected to the sanitary sewer system. The sanitary sewer pipes are for wastewater only from sources such as toilets, sinks, dishwashers and washing machines, not rainwater or groundwater.

When water that doesn't belong fills up the sanitary sewer pipe, untreated sewage backs up into buildings or overflows into streams and rivers. "We plan to find excess water in the sanitary sewer system at the source and remove it so our system doesn't overflow and our ratepayers don't have to pay to treat the excess water," said Kevin Swearingin, Springfield Collection System Supervisor.

Part of the sanitary system is owned by the City and part is owned by property owners. Property owners are responsible for the sewer pipe that runs from their home or building to the City's sewer pipe in the street. Dan Hegwald, of CH2MHill, the contractor conducting the smoke tests said, "Many communities that have smoke tested sewers and made repairs have found that about half of the excess water in the sanitary sewer system comes from problems with the sewers on private property." Springfield plans to conduct tests in different parts of the city over the next five years to locate improper connections, make repairs, test repair methods and develop a long-term Sanitary Sewer Overflow Control Plan.

The smoke testing program and necessary repairs of utility sanitary sewer pipes from the program are part of the City's \$50 million planned investment over the next seven years to fix more than 100 miles of leaky sewer pipes and to make improvements to the overall sewer system. This \$50 million Early Action Program is in addition to regular operations, maintenance and routine capital projects. The City is currently developing a long-term Sanitary Sewer Overflow Control Plan and negotiating with regulators to determine what else needs to be done to address sanitary sewer overflows. Hundreds of millions more will need to be spent following the seven year Early Action Program to reduce sewer overflows. This investment by ratepayers is not funded by taxes. It is funded by the rates paid for sewer service on utility bills.

“Ratepayers are making a major investment in our aging infrastructure to reduce sanitary sewer overflows and protect water quality,” said Steve Meyer, Springfield Director of Environmental Services, ”and we will partner with our ratepayers to help address these problems on their property so we can provide reliable service at a reasonable cost.”

Springfield manages wastewater and storm water with two separate systems. Wastewater travels through pipes to the treatment plant before being discharged to streams and rivers. Storm water travels through pipes and is discharged to streams and rivers without going to the treatment plant.

Available resources:

- [Smoke Testing FAQs](#) (pdf)
- [Graphic of a typical sewer line setup.](#)

Media are welcome to cover the testing when it begins later this month.

For more information, please contact the Steve Meyer, Department of Environmental Services, (417) 864-2047.