

The Combined Sewer Overflow Project

FAQs

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Andy Schor, Mayor

CSO Story

Why do we have combined sewers?

In the 1800s and early 1900s, sewers were designed to get sewage and storm water out of the street and to the nearest river. There were no treatment plants, and only one pipe was needed for both types of flow.

As communities grew, dry weather sewage flow was collected and diverted to discharge to the river downstream of the City via sanitary sewage interceptors located along the river. However, peak flows of combined rainwater and sewage were too great for the sewage interceptors and continued to overflow directly to the river during wet weather events. Eventually, a two-pipe separate sewer system was required in all new service areas, but the combined sewer areas remained.

Is Lansing the only Michigan community with CSOs?

No, when DNRE began action to eliminate the discharge of untreated combined sewage, there were approximately 80 communities with combined sewer systems with some or all of their systems combined. Nationwide, there are over 700 communities subject to CSO regulations.

Is Lansing the only community required to eliminate their CSOs?

No, all communities are required to eliminate or adequately treat their CSOs based on their DNRE--approved long-term CSO Control plan.

Is separation the only method selected by communities or approved by the DEQ?

No, solutions to correct CSOs were developed for each community based on the specific nature of the combined sewer areas. Solutions have included separation, retention, tunnels, treatment and a combination of these options.

Why do I have to redirect inflow sources from my sanitary service lead?

Once Lansing's collection system has separate sanitary and storm sewers, all rain water will need to be directed to storm sewers, or basement backups could occur. Each property owner is responsible for making sure that all sources of water from their property are routed to the correct pipe. For more information on removing private inflow sources, see our [Inflow Brochure](#).

What can I do to keep local waters safe and clean?

With the new separated storm sewers delivering all flows straight to our rivers, it's important to remember that only rain belongs in the storm drain. We can all help keep our waterways clean by:

- Never dumping anything but clean water down a storm drain
- Promptly fixing vehicle leaks
- Bagging pet waste and disposing of it in the trash
- Avoiding fertilizing before expected heavy rainfall
- Using fertilizers and pesticides sparingly
- Taking cars to a commercial car wash where the water is often recycled before going to the treatment plant or washing your car on your lawn
- Carefully storing and/or properly disposing of household cleaners, chemicals and oil

Funding

How are we paying for the CSO separation program?

At this time the revenue from the Sewage Fund, also known as sewer bills, is funding the cash and debt service needs associated with the CSO Program.

Where does the sewage fund revenue come from?

The major portion of the sewage fund revenue is generated from monthly sewer charges paid by those discharging to the sewage system. A letter is sent annually to system users outlining the sewage rates, the methodology, and how it is being used.

What do you do with all of that SRF loan money that is sitting around waiting to pay for construction?

There are no SRF loan funds advanced to the City until it has already expended them. Once an SRF loan has been approved, the City does not receive the funds immediately from the MDNRE. Periodically we submit a reimbursement request to the MDNRE for the monies spent for the previous period. The MDNRE reviews and approves the reimbursement request and then sends payment to the City for monies they have already paid to the contractors for work completed.

Your Role

What is Inflow?

Inflow is rainwater or snow melt that enters the separate sanitary sewer system. Inflow causes excess flow to enter the sanitary sewer and may result in basement flooding and/or discharge to the rivers.

What are the sources of Inflow?

Inflow sources can include:

- "Disappearing" roof downspouts
- Catch basins
- Yard and patio drains
- Pumped footing drains
- Loading dock drains

Why do I need to remove Inflow?

The City is in the middle of a 30-year program to separate its combined sewer system. This is required to prevent combined sewage overflows into the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers. If your private inflow sources are not removed when the City completes the separation process, it can result in flooded basements or sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) to the rivers. Each property owner is responsible for making sure that all sources of water from their property are routed to the correct pipe.

Am I required to remove inflow sources from my property?

Yes. Lansing Code of Ordinance, 1040.10, prohibits the discharge of stormwater and other sources of water into the sanitary sewer system.

Who pays to remove inflow sources from my property?

The property owner is responsible to pay the cost to separate the private property and direct the sanitary and stormwater flows to the proper pipe. The City does provide a free helpline to answer questions and provide advice on removing inflow sources. Call 517.394.5577 for assistance.

Where can I find more information on Inflow and its removal?

View the [CSO Control Program Inflow brochure](#) or contact the Private Property Inflow Removal Helpline at 517.394.5577.

When will I need to address my sources of inflow?

Typically, you will receive your first notification letter from the City about 18 months prior to the CSO project beginning in your area. Work will need to be completed prior to the start of construction on your street. The State of Michigan passed Public Act No. 4 in 1998 which requires disconnection of roof downspouts in combined sewer areas. As noted above in Lansing's code, downspouts are not permitted to discharge to sanitary sewers either. Do yourself and your neighbors a favor by disconnecting as soon as you can to help avoid sewer system flooding during wet weather.