



CONSENT DECREE Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Consent Decree?

The Consent Decree is an agreement between the City of Fort Smith, the EPA, and the Department of Justice to reduce sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs). SSOs result when untreated sewage is accidentally discharged from the sanitary sewer collection system into public waters of the United States (i.e., rivers, streams, etc.). The Consent Decree requires the City to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the sanitary sewer system, and to develop projects that will address sewer capacity deficiencies.

What causes untreated sewage to be discharged?

Untreated sewage is discharged back into the environment through Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs). SSOs are unintentional releases of sewage/wastewater from the public sanitary sewer collection system.

What causes SSOs?

SSOs occur because of a variety of reasons, including:

- Accumulation of FOG (Fats, Oils, and Grease), solid materials, or roots within sewer lines
- Defects in sewer pipelines, service lines, and manholes
- Undersized sanitary sewer lines
- Misaligned joints
- Collapse of sewer main lines
- Illegal dumping of solids and chemicals

Why are some sanitary sewer lines undersized?

Undersized sanitary sewer lines are typically a result of growth and development surpassing the original sewer design capacity. Infiltration and Inflow (I&I) can also contribute to water volumes, which requires pipe upsizing.

What is I&I?

- **Infiltration** is the term used for groundwater entering sanitary sewers through pipe and manhole defects.
- **Inflow** is water that is dumped into the sewer system through improper connections (foundation or roof drains), or enters the sewer from above-ground sources (leaky manhole covers, missing or damaged cleanout caps). Inflow primarily occurs during rain events.

Why is I&I a problem?

I&I allows excess water into the sanitary sewer collection system. Water from I&I is considered “clean water”. It does not have to be treated prior to discharge into public waters (rivers, lakes, etc.).

- I&I requires larger sewer main pipelines to handle the additional water volume.
- I&I requires larger wastewater plant capacity to treat the additional water volume.

Larger pipelines and wastewater plants are more expensive to install and maintain. Reducing the volume of water in the sanitary sewer collection system saves money.

How is the City of Fort Smith fixing the sanitary sewer collection system?

The City is approaching the Consent Decree using various methods, including:

- Cleaning and visual assessment of sewer line and manhole conditions
- Identification of sewer lines to be repaired, replaced, or upsized
- Operational programs to extend the life of existing sewer lines

How is the City of Fort Smith repairing or replacing sewer lines?

Sewer lines can be repaired using a variety of methods, including:

- Open trench replacement – dig the old pipe out, put the new pipe in
- Pipe bursting – pulling a new pipe through the old pipe
- Cured-in-Place Pipe (CIPP) – lining the old pipe with new coating
- Point repairs – any of the above methods, applied only to a small section

How is the City of Fort Smith repairing or replacing manholes?

Sewer manholes can be repaired using a variety of methods, including:

- Open trench replacement – dig the old manhole out, put a new manhole in
- Lining – coating a manhole to repair defects
- Fiberglass insert – placing a new manhole inside the existing manhole
- Grout/Cement Repair – coating holes/cracks in manhole

How will I be impacted by sanitary sewer collection system work?

You may see construction work around your property and utility workers may need to enter the property. Sewer service line connections to the public sewer main will be replaced to the edge of the property line, and a clean-out installed (Clean-outs are small tubes that allow your service line to be located and cleaned). While your service line is being replaced, you will be asked to abstain from flushing your toilet, washing clothes/dishes, showering, or any activities that use your sewer service line. Your service line will not be out of service longer than 8 hours, from 8am to 6pm.

In extreme cases, fences, trees, mailboxes, driveways, or other structures may need to be temporarily removed to perform the work. These items will be paid for, and/or replaced, depending on the situation in question. If your property will be impacted, the City or a Contractor hired by the City will contact you prior to starting work.

What can I do to help minimize SSOs and the repair work associated with the Consent Decree?

As a citizen, there are many ways you can help minimize SSOs and sewer repair work.

- Keep your private sewer service line in good repair, to minimize leaks.
- Don't use your toilet as a trash can. Only human waste and toilet paper should be flushed down the toilet.
- Dispose of Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) in the garbage – NEVER down the drain.
- Immediately replace a missing or broken cleanout cap.