



PRESS RELEASE

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Sanitary Sewer Overflow

Wausau Water Works had a sewer overflow event last week. On Tuesday, January 23, 2018 at about 11:00am a sewer odor was reported by residents in the area of Sturgeon Eddy Road. Upon immediate investigation, raw wastewater was flowing onto the ground and down to the WI River due to an overflow from a large sanitary sewer pipe. The initial determination for the overflow was a broken sewer pipe but it was found to be caused by a blockage in the pipe downstream in a section of pipe beneath the WI River. This overflow was occurring through a safety overflow bypass in place in case this type of back-up occurred. This overflow was unavoidable in order to prevent a large volume of wastewater from backing-up into hundreds of houses which would have resulted in direct contact health risks and severe property damage with immediate and long term safety consequences for the homes affected. Because of the location of the plugged pipe and the volume of backed-up wastewater, there were no feasible alternatives to the release.

Wausau notified the WDNR of the overflow and utility crews immediately implemented their emergency response plan and began to reduce flows to this area to slow the overflow and minimize the release to the WI River. The plugged pipe collects and carries wastewater from the entire southeast side of Wausau and Schofield, the pipe runs under the WI River to the wastewater treatment plant and carries approximately 1 million gallons per day. Outside contractors were contacted immediately and tanker trucks were brought in to the release site as soon as possible. Trucks began pumping wastewater from the system at two locations, one location in Schofield off of Grand Avenue and one in Wausau on Sturgeon Eddy Road, and trucked it over to the WWTP in order to reduce the volume going to the WI River. Trucking began Tuesday afternoon, as soon as possible, and ran continuously through the night and into Wednesday. Wausau staff from Public Works Divisions (Wausau Water Works, Streets & Maintenance and Engineering) worked through the night to fix the problem. As a result of the continuous effort, flow to the river was dramatically reduced and late Tuesday night a plug was able to be placed in the pipe ending the release to the WI River. The next day, daylight made it possible to determine the pipe was indeed not broken, but rather plugged. To clear the blockage, a high pressure jetter was brought in to attempt to clear the pipe. After an unsuccessful attempt at jetting from the WWTP side of the river, this jetting commenced from the south side of the river and was able to clear the blockage in the pipe around mid-day. The plug in the pipe was removed about 1pm on Wednesday and trucking and hauling operations were stopped about 2pm on Wednesday. The system was then put back online and once again was fully operational.

The overflow discharge to the WI River, although unfortunate, was unavoidable. The safety overflow pipe saved a large number of residents from having raw wastewater back up into their homes, being a direct health risk for the residents and causing property damage at residents' expense. The rapid response of Wausau Water Works, Streets and Maintenance and Engineering helped to ensure there was no health risk to residents and the impact to the WI River was minimized to the extent practically feasible.

Records at the wastewater treatment plant were reviewed and it was estimated that 3.7 million gallons of wastewater flowed into the river during the duration of the event. This number represents a very small portion ($1/2500^{\text{th}}$ or 0.04%) of total river flow in that portion of the river for the overflow event. Wastewater flow to the treatment plant from this pipe contributes about 20% of the average daily flow as the plant treats an average of 5.4 million gallons per day. Fluctuations of flow to the plant of 20%-30% are not unusual and therefore this drop in flow did not immediately indicate a problem. Ideas for process improvements are currently being discussed and reviewed and include placing a monitoring system in the overflow pipe to give Wausau Water works earlier detection in an event like this. Long term plans to prevent recurrence include: changes in system design at regulated industries discharging to this sewer line to prevent future line plugging and the possibility of additional incoming flow monitoring of the sewer lines entering the plant to detect significant flow changes for earlier warnings. Wausau Water Works has an extensive annual maintenance routine throughout the city for cleaning and jetting sewer lines for inspection and repair. The City of Wausau takes the safety of residents, protection of their property, and stewardship to the environment very seriously. We appreciate the assistance and cooperation of the WDNR in responding to this event and working with us to correct the overflow.