



# 3 RIVERS PROUD

# ALCOSAN'S MODIFIED CONSENT DECREE & CLEAN WATER PLAN

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is a consent decree?

A consent decree is a document that is part of a court order negotiated by ALCOSAN, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the PA Department of Environmental Protection and the Allegheny County Health Department. The consent decree spells out what ALCOSAN must do to comply with the federal Clean Water Act. This includes details on how ALCOSAN will reduce combined sewer overflows, eliminate sanitary sewer overflows, as well as the timeline in which it will complete the work. We are referring to this as the Clean Water Plan.

ALCOSAN's first phase of the Clean Water Plan is a \$2 billion, 20-year plan for improving the quality of the region's waterways by reducing the volume of overflows by almost (7) seven billion gallons a year.

Because of the topography of the region and the age of the sewer infrastructure that sends wastewater to ALCOSAN's treatment plant, the system becomes overloaded when it rains or when snow melts. In turn, that causes diluted, untreated wastewater to overflow into the area's rivers, streams and creeks.



### What is included in the Clean Water Plan?

ALCOSAN's Clean Water Plan, as required by the consent decree, will tackle the problem of overflows with four methods:

- **Preventing excess water from entering the sewer system**  
This involves use of the latest technology including green infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens; lining and repairing pipes to prevent groundwater from seeping into the system; diverting clean streams so they don't flow directly into sewers; and sewer separation projects. To advance this effort, ALCOSAN established Green Revitalization of Our Waterways (GROW), a multi-million-dollar grant program that funds projects that municipalities and sewer authorities might not be able to afford otherwise.
- **Increasing adaptive management and conveyance capacity**  
ALCOSAN will use adaptive management and base long-term planning on data from green infrastructure, flow-reduction projects, and the latest technology. This is a deviation from typical consent decrees in that the parties to the order are willing to consider additional stages with more green infrastructure, provided that it can be shown to be impactful in reducing overflows. In return for that, ALCOSAN will also expand its conveyance system by adding pipes, diversion structures and tunnels.
- **Regionalizing multi-municipal sewers**  
ALCOSAN will make a good faith effort to assume ownership of existing multi-municipal trunk sewers and related facilities. ALCOSAN has conducted closed-circuit television inspections of these sewers, determined what repairs and improvements are necessary, and is now in the process of working with the municipalities to transfer ownership and make the necessary repairs. With the anticipated addition of more than 200 miles of sewer infrastructure as ALCOSAN's responsibility, the system will be more efficient and seamless and it will reduce some of the burden on municipalities.
- **Expanding the wastewater treatment plant**  
The current capacity of 250 million gallons per day (mgd) makes ALCOSAN the largest wastewater treatment system in the region, but greater capacity is needed. The main pump station already has been upgraded and a new vehicle maintenance garage has been built outside the plant gates, making room to expand the treatment operation. ALCOSAN will expand wet weather treatment capacity of the plant from 250 mgd to 480 mgd and wet weather headworks and disinfection capacity to 600 mgd.

## What does this mean for me as a ratepayer?

In order to offset the cost of the required improvements, rates will be increased. Keeping the cost of the Clean Water Plan as affordable as possible for the majority of our system users is important. Because of the changes contained in this amended consent decree, the cost has been spread out over a longer period of time. Additionally, the authority has been more proactive with its own finances to keep the costs down. As a result, rates are expected to increase 7 percent each year for 2019, 2020, and 2021 rather than the 10 percent which had been projected. This means that the average customer will pay \$513 per year, or \$42.75 per month by 2021.

We know that the new rates may still be out of reach for some. In 2016, the ALCOSAN Board of Directors created the Clean Water Assistance Fund, administered by the Dollar Energy Fund, to help homeowners with their wastewater treatment bills. One million dollars (\$1,000,000) is set-aside each year by ALCOSAN for the program. For more information, contact Dollar Energy Fund at 1-800-683-7036.

## Has ALCOSAN started any of the projects in the Clean Water Plan?

Yes. While negotiating the modified consent decree, ALCOSAN began work on many of the methods outlined for addressing overflows.

- Our GROW program is in its fourth cycle with over \$22 million of grant awards for 80 projects distributed among 38 member municipalities and municipal sewer authorities. This investment has leveraged another \$25 million in municipal, authority and third-party funding for projects that are projected to remove 127 million gallons of water from the system.
- We have been working with our customer municipalities and municipal sewer authorities to transfer ownership of multi-municipal trunk sewers, and other structures, to ALCOSAN.
- We have completed the report for the plant expansion and are working on the detail for projects to increase treatment capacity. Construction will begin in 2020.
- We are evaluating conveyance upgrades and required tunnels to meet our sewer overflow reduction requirements.



## What about green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) and Source Control (SC)?

Based on existing technologies and science, we know that green stormwater infrastructure and source control does not solve the overflow problem that our region faces. Because of that, ALCOSAN instituted the GROW program with a mission to reduce water entering the system. Our consent decree allows us to adapt, and the parties to the order are willing to consider additional stages with more green infrastructure, provided that it can be shown to be impactful on overflow reduction. So that we can meet that requirement, ALCOSAN will soon be releasing Controlling the Source, a science-based evaluation of all methods of source control. This evaluation will provide data to municipalities on where they can build projects that are cost-effective and are most beneficial to control overflows.

## Do other cities have this problem?

Absolutely. The problem of combined sewer overflows is common and many cities were issued similar consent decrees. The size of ALCOSAN's problem and the estimated cost of fixing it is comparable to similarly sized metropolitan areas. For example, the overflow problem in billions of gallons annually and the cost of mandated upgrades are:

- 13.3 billion gallons per year and \$4.7 billion in St. Louis
- 11.5 billion gallons per year and \$3.1 billion in Cincinnati
- 6.5 billion gallons per year and \$2.48 billion in Kansas City
- 4.5 billion gallons per year and \$3 billion in Northeast Ohio
- 9 billion gallons per year and \$2 billion for ALCOSAN

In all cases, the plans are estimated to take at least 20 years. There are differences, however. Some have more combined sewers and less sanitary sewer systems. In the ALCOSAN service area, our problems are more widespread with a combination of both combined sewers and sanitary-only sewers throughout our system.

**For more information, please visit [www.alcosan.org](http://www.alcosan.org) or [www.3riversproud.com](http://www.3riversproud.com) or call 412-734-6274.**

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