

- Keep clipped grass and other yard wastes away from storm drains. This debris can quickly clog sewer lines and cause minor flooding. It can also affect water quality and aquatic life in receiving waters.
- Place mulch around trees and plants to slow evaporation and enhance the soil's ability to retain moisture.

**Reduce Runoff & Pollutants**

- Reduce impervious surfaces (asphalt, concrete) on your property where possible. Impervious surfaces generate five times more runoff than a woodland area of identical size. Replace concrete driveways with porous pavement.
- Use a rain barrel to capture and re-use stormwater.
- Use water-efficient landscaping such as rain gardens and bioretention swales to absorb stormwater and remove pollutants.
- Wash your vehicle at a local car wash rather than in your driveway.
- Avoid overuse of fertilizers and snow-melt products and use natural pesticides.
- Do not use home drains to dispose of pharmaceuticals, household chemicals, vehicle fluids or other hazardous waste.



# Sewer Overflows: What Can You Do?

A Guide to the Wet  
Weather Issue and  
How You Can Help  
Solve It



*For more information about the  
sewage overflow issue, contact:*

ALCOSAN Public Relations  
300 Preble Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15233  
(412) 766-4810  
www.alcosan.org

## Stay Informed!

Attend ALCOSAN's public meetings and the annual Open House, share information with friends and neighbors, follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and visit the ALCOSAN website at [www.alcosan.org](http://www.alcosan.org).



## What is a Sewer Overflow?

During wet weather events such as heavy rains or Spring snow melt, excess water can overload our aging sewer system and overflow into rivers and streams without reaching the wastewater treatment facility. As little as one-tenth of an inch of rainfall can send diluted sewage and additional pollutants from houses, yards and roadways into our waterways.

A **Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO)** occurs when stormwater and sewage, carried in a single pipe, overload the sewer system and flow untreated into rivers and streams. CSOs contain a variety of pollutants such as debris, chemicals, bacteria and animal waste.

A **Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO)** occurs when a line designed to carry sewage only becomes overloaded with stormwater. This causes untreated sewage to overflow from manholes or back up into basements.

Both CSOs and SSOs violate federal and state environmental laws. While ALCOSAN began taking steps to address overflows as early as 1992, a federal Consent Decree issued under mandate of the EPA, the PA



Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Allegheny County Health Department on January 23, 2008 requires that ALCOSAN develop a comprehensive plan

to reduce CSOs and eliminate SSOs by 2026. This plan - with a projected cost in the billions - will initiate the largest public works project in the region's history.

## Why Do They Occur?

The region's sewer system, parts of which are more than 100 years old, is showing its age. Some sections of the system lack



capacity, and cracked and deteriorating pipes allow infiltration of additional rain and snow melt. Overgrown tree roots in the pipes can inhibit flow. In addition, many households have improperly connected downspouts or sump pumps which force stormwater into sewer lines designed to carry only sewage.

## What Is the Concern?

Sewage in our region's waterways could be a public health risk for those who come in contact with the affected water. In addition, nearly all Allegheny County residents get their drinking water from the three rivers. Overflows can pollute those sources of drinking water and place an additional burden on water treatment facilities. They can also kill fish and other aquatic life. Overflows can impede economic development also, as communities can be restricted from tapping into sewers for new homes and businesses.

## Who is Responsible?

ALCOSAN, municipalities and homeowners all play a significant role in solving this problem. In addition to planned system improvements and expansion of treatment capacity at the ALCOSAN plant, our customer municipalities are under individual Consent Orders to reduce excess stormwater from entering the system. The enormous combined cost of these projects will result in sewage rate increases for ratepayers. However, ALCOSAN and our municipal partners continue to work together to develop the most cost-effective solutions to address overflows on a regional level.

## What Can You Do?

The following measures can be acted upon by homeowners and can have an immediate and significant impact on public health and the environment:

### Property Management

- Inspect downspouts and/or sump pumps to ensure that they are not connected to the sanitary sewer system. Disconnect immediately or re-direct downspouts to allow runoff to soak into your lawn or garden. (This may be a requirement in order to sell your home.)
- Ensure that your lateral sewer line and other plumbing are in good condition. Avoid landscaping near sewer lines to prevent root damage and blockages.

