

# CURRENTS

## Celebrating Sewer Awareness Month

### Second annual spotlight highlights the importance of Pittsburgh's sewer system

For more than 100 years, sewers have delivered incredible public health benefits to the people of Pittsburgh. A well-functioning sewer system serves a sanitary function and protects the environment, diverting stormwater and sewage that would otherwise overflow our streams and rivers to the wastewater treatment plant. Since we're all accustomed to seeing water go down the drain or disappear into a storm grate, sewers are often out of sight and mind.

All our lives would be much harder without sewers. That's why, for the second year now, PWSA in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) is proud to celebrate **Sewer Awareness Month** this September. This month-long spotlight on our sewer system will highlight the criticality of the infrastructure right under our feet, detail how PWSA is making investments to defend our drains and communities, and share helpful, small-scale actions we can all take to protect one of the most important systems we have.

Most of Pittsburgh's sewers are

over 75-100 years old. Today, PWSA has more than 1,200 miles of sewers in its system. If we laid those sewer pipes out end to end, they'd stretch from Pittsburgh to Dallas. The flow in the sewers moves from homes, businesses, and storm grates to ALCOSAN's treatment plant, where wastewater is treated and cleaned and then released back into our rivers.

Of the 1,200+ miles, about 70% is "combined" sewer mains, meaning both wastewater and stormwater flow through. The remaining 30% is "separated" sewers, meaning we have separate sewer lines for stormwater and wastewater.

To extend the life of our sewers, PWSA has made and will continue to make meaningful capital investments to ensure it continues to serve Pittsburgh for generations to come. To note a few examples:

- The recent rehabilitation of the 100-year-old M-29 sewer outfall on the Monongahela River, which will reduce river flow entering the combined sewer system and help reduce backups.



- Rehabilitating large diameter sewers mains, 36-inches in diameter or larger, to fortify the structural integrity of the sewer pipes.
- The Fuchsia Way Sewer Reconstruction Project, which will fully replace the sewer main and provide impacted residents with greater protection from sewer backups.

To better protect Pittsburgh residents from the impacts of climate change and too much rain, PWSA is evaluating the capacity of our system and analyzing the level of stormwater protection we can

provide across the city. This strategic planning will identify projects to strengthen our sewer system and prioritize locations for new stormwater infrastructure.

We all can play a part in helping keep our sewers flowing. Only flush items the sewer is designed to handle – toilet paper, human waste, and nothing else. Fatty, oily foods, car or mechanical grease, and wipes marketed as flushable build up over time, block the flow of wastewater, and cause the system to overflow.

Be sure to check out the rest of this newsletter and monitor our social media channels for more sewer-related information!

## CEO Briefing by *Chief Executive Officer Will Pickering*

### The history – and future – of Pittsburgh’s sewer system



Pittsburgh’s first sewers were built as early as 1840 in what is now Pittsburgh’s Shadyside and Oakland neighborhoods. By the early 1900s, nearly 400 miles of underground sewer lines were in place, establishing the foundation of our sewer system.

However, these early public sewers discharged directly into the Monongahela River. This kind of river pollution, made worse by a lack of water filtration, contributed to the 1880s typhoid fever outbreak, which resulted in the deaths of more than 8,000 people in the area over 25 years.

It wasn’t until 1959 that ALCOSAN became fully operational to accept and treat millions of gallons of used water before returning it to the Ohio River. This regional investment vastly improved public health and water quality in our rivers.

While our sewers serve a simple purpose – to move

sewage and stormwater away from homes and businesses for treatment – a sewer failure can be very impactful. When sewer walls crack or collapse, they can cause sinkholes and sewer backups.

That’s why we’re investing more than \$41 million dollars into Pittsburgh’s sewer system this year. From large diameter sewer main projects, which will rehabilitate aging sewer pipes, to the recent rehabilitation of the 100-year-old M-29 sewer outfall on the Monongahela River, which will help reduce backups into the Four Mile Run neighborhood, we’re making the improvements needed to extend the useful life of

Pittsburgh’s sewers and protect our environment. You can learn more about the investments we’re making in this issue or by visiting our [Sewer](#) webpage.

Finally, we all can play a part in helping keep our sewers flowing. Only flush items the sewer is designed to handle – toilet paper, human waste, and nothing else. Fatty, oily foods, car or mechanical grease, and wipes marketed as flushable build up over time, block the flow of wastewater, and cause the system to overflow.

Please be sure to follow us on social media for **#SewerAwarenessMonth** content this September.

### TEAM PGH20

## Employee Spotlight: Howard Street Sewer Crews



Early every weekday morning, PWSA’s sewer team assembles at our facility on the North Side to begin their day protecting our city’s sewer system.

With our sewers largely out of sight, the essential work they perform often goes unnoticed. Make no mistake: their diligence and hard work ensures the operability of the infrastructure that protects our health and the environment.

PWSA’s sewer team of Vactor Operators, TV Truck Specialists, and Utility Workers help maintain our sewer system, which can take on a variety of different kinds of work. Our Vactor Operators, who drive a truck shown on the right, flush water into sewer pipes to brush away debris. They also help to identify possible leaks or cracks in the pipes in conjunction with our TV Truck Specialists, who maneuver specialized cameras along the sewers for a better view of the pipes. Upon suspicion of a sinkhole caused by a break in a sewer lateral, these crews perform a dye test, which sends a colored liquid into the pipes to identify possible breaks. Our Utility Workers partner with the rest of the team to support their



work. For example, those team members oversee the safety of our crews when they must man a confined space entry.

In September, we’ll release

a “Day in the Life” video highlighting our sewer crews and the critical work they perform to protect our sewers. Please keep an eye on our social media for that fun video.



## Rehabilitating our Largest Sewer Mains

Our largest sewers in the system, which are responsible for carrying large volumes of sewage and stormwater, require special attention. They are, after all, our primary defense in moving sewage and stormwater away from homes and businesses to be treated by ALCOSAN.

When the walls of these sewers crack or collapse, they can cause sinkholes and sewer backups. Additionally, full sewer replacements can be costly and time-consuming projects.

Over the coming years, PWSA will rehabilitate large diameter sewer mains 36-inches in diameter or more to fortify the structural integrity of the sewer pipes we rely on each day,



*Historic image of PWSA sewer being constructed*

remove roots, and repair cracks. Using modern construction techniques, Pittsburgh's aging sewer mains will be stronger, more structurally sound, and free from cracks that may cause excess water to seep into the pipe, helping to extend the life

of our sewers and ensure they continue to serve Pittsburgh for generations to come.

For more information on this project or our other sewer projects, please visit our [Sewer](#) webpage.

## PGH2O IN THE COMMUNITY

### Update: Fuchsia Way Sewer Reconstruction

Last summer, community advocates from Homewood invited PWSA to a discussion regarding sewer-related issues affecting customers on Race and Monticello Streets, serviced by a shared alley known as Fuchsia Way.

Present at the community meeting were several PWSA representatives, including members of our Executive, Engineering, and Public Affairs departments. After hearing feedback from customers, we investigated each issue and ultimately determined that a full water and sewer main replacement was the best course of action. This decision was also informed by data gathered from residents through a community survey

and information provided to us during individual follow-up conversations.

On March 23, we hosted members of the community and other key stakeholders, including representatives from the Mayor's Office, for an informative overview of the project, which has been under construction since April.

The scope of work is as follows:

- Reconstruction of sewer main, manholes, and storm drains
- Full replacement of PWSA water main
- Replacement of identified lead service lines
- Restoration of street and impacted sidewalks



*Contractor crews installing the new sewer main on Fuchsia Way in Homewood*

The Fuchsia Way Sewer Reconstruction Project is a community-focused solution that will improve the reliability of water and wastewater services in Homewood. For more information, please visit the [Project](#) webpage.

#### Defend Your Drains

Dumping the wrong items down your drains can cause serious damage to your pipes and the public sewer system. Follow these tips to avoid a nasty backup.

**Wipes Clog Pipes:** Wipes and cleaning cloths, even those labeled "flushable," don't decompose when flushed down the drain. Instead they clog home plumbing and the sewer system. Only flush #1, #2, and toilet paper. Everything else goes in the trash!

**FOG Alert:** Fats, oils, and grease, referred to as FOGs, can also create problems. These are fatty, greasy substances such as butter, cooking oil, salad dressing, mayonnaise, gravy, coffee grounds, and food scraps. When poured down the drain, they form clumps and harden, which can lead to sewer backups. Instead, dispose of cooled FOGs in a container, like a mason jar or can, and toss it in the trash.

**The Fatberg Effect:** When wipes and FOGs combine, they become huge clogs called "fatbergs" that can cause breaks in home plumbing systems and our sewer infrastructure. Removing a fatberg is dangerous for our workers and a costly public expense. When they clog your sewer lateral, it's an expensive repair for the homeowner.

Learn more on our [Defend Your Drains](#) webpage.

## Customer Assistance Programs

Our Customer Assistance Programs are designed to provide financial relief for income-qualified residential customers who are having difficulty paying their PGH2O bill. These programs are managed by our **PGH2O Cares team**, a group of education and outreach professionals dedicated to working directly with our most vulnerable customers to bolster enrollment in our Customer Assistance Programs and identify ways to reduce water usage.



For more information about our programs, including the **Winter Shut Off Moratorium, Bill Discount, Flexible Payment Plans, Hardship Grant, and Lead Line Reimbursements**, please visit our [Customer Assistance Program](#) page or call Dollar Energy Fund at 866.762.2348.

## Additional Assistance Programs

Additional assistance programs are offered separately from PWSA's Customer Assistance Programs.

The **Low Income Housing Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)** provides drinking water and wastewater assistance to eligible renters or homeowners who are experiencing a water crisis. Please visit this [website](#) or call 877-395-8931 for more information and to apply.

The **Pennsylvania Housing Assistance Fund (PAHAF)** provides financial assistance to eligible homeowners to help cover water and wastewater charges. Please visit their [website](#) or call 888-987-2423 for more information and to apply.

The **Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) Clean Water Assistance Fund** is available to eligible residential customers. It is also administered by Dollar Energy Fund. To learn more and apply for assistance, visit the [Clean Water Assistance Fund](#) page.

## Neighbors Helping Neighbors

If you can, consider donating to our [Hardship Grant Program](#).

## Enroll in eBilling

Convenient and easy to use, our online billing and payment portal ensures timely delivery of bills and payments.

**New enrollees who also enroll in the autopay feature on our [website](#) will receive a one-time \$5 discount on their bill.**

## Do We Have Your Number?

**Did you know that we call customers during water emergencies and outages?**

It is important to verify that we have the best number to reach you. You can even add multiple numbers for your account, so your entire household is informed about our work.

**TO UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO:**

**Call PWSA Customer Service:  
412.255.2423 (Press 5)**

**Visit our [Update Contact Information](#) portal.**

## Stay in the know with PGH2O!

Join our email list to make sure you're getting the latest news and updates. Signing up is simple on our [News & Events](#) page.

[linkedin.com/company/pgh2o](https://www.linkedin.com/company/pgh2o) [facebook.com/pgh2o](https://www.facebook.com/pgh2o)

[@pgh2o](https://twitter.com/pgh2o)

[nextdoor.com](https://www.nextdoor.com)

Penn Liberty Plaza 1  
1200 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

**Customer Service**  
T 412.255.2423 (Press 5)  
[info@pgh2o.com](mailto:info@pgh2o.com)

**Emergency Dispatch**  
T 412.255.2423 (Press 1)  
Available 24/7

### Board of Directors

**Chair**

Alex Sciulli

**Vice Chairperson**

Erika Strassburger

**Secretary/Treasurer**

BJ Leber

**Assistant Secretary/  
Treasurer**

Michael Domach

**Members**

Peg McCormick Barron

Rosamaria Cristello

Audrey Murrell

Mark Anthony Thomas

### Currents Contributors

**Will Pickering**

*Chief Executive Officer*

**Rebecca Zito**

*Senior Manager of  
Public Affairs*

**Julie Ascioffa**

*Industry Relations Manager*

**Rachel Rampa**

*Senior Public Affairs  
Coordinator*

**Ross Marcinizyn**

*Internal Communications  
Specialist*

**Mora McLaughlin**

*Construction Communications  
Project Manager*

**Jordan Treaster**

*Development Coordinator*

**Elaine Hinrichs**

*Education and Outreach  
Associate*

**Hali Hetz**

*Public Affairs Associate*

**Nick Letzkus**

*Public Affairs Associate*