

June spill goes to council over a month after incident

East end councillor unhappy with communication shortfall

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Two more sewage spills and delayed communication of a mid June incident has Orléans city councillor Bob Monette "furious."

During an inspection of sewage regulators on June 14th 2006, City of Ottawa staff found that a regulator under Kent Street was damaged.

The regulator was repaired, but some volume of raw sewage made its way into the Ottawa River.

In a memo sent to council and city staff, Dave McCartney, the city's director of water and wastewater services estimated "a worst case scenario" of nearly 10,000 cubic metres of sewage made its way into the Ottawa River.

While council was not informed of the situation until late last month, the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and Ottawa Public Health were notified.

With everything that has recently been discovered with the massive sewage spill of 2006 which resulted in a disastrous swimming season for Petrie Island, Monette said he is questioning whether or not the protocols that were put in place after the 2006 incident

are working, where council needed to be informed immediately after a sewage spill.

"Frustration reached its peak with all Orléans councillors when we were notified a month and a half after the mid June blockage," said Monette. "I was absolutely furious finding out that the procedures that we (city manager, council and the mayor) had set in place were not again followed."

After the 2006 spill where

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Orléans city councillor Bob Monette said he was less than thrilled when council learned about a June 14 sewage spill in late July.

SPILL

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council was not informed until nearly two years later about a faulty gate was left open after a heavy rainfall that saw 960,000 cubic metres of raw sewage flow into the Ottawa River, which led to high levels of E. coli bacteria at Petrie Island. City council and staff worked together to ensure that the appropriate steps are taken to make sure similar events don't occur in the future.

"We have set procedures that not only notifies council, but it is also mandatory that all aspects such as identifying and re-

pairing, as well as notifying the MOE and all departments in the City of Ottawa are set," said Monette. "We also send out media advisories so that the public is informed as soon as something like this happens."

Coun. Monette also noted that the Robert O. Pickford Environmental Centre (ROPEC), is in the process of undertaking renovations that will alleviate many of the delay aspects of any blocked gates in the sewage system, which includes a \$70 million sewage digester.

It was at the east end facility that the events of 2006 were first discovered.

"That's not chunk change," said Innes city councillor Rainer Bloess. "With new additions at ROPEC, it will help with our sewage problems."

Another spill occurred after a heavy rainfall on July 18th of this year, where a regulator under Booth Street was jammed with debris which allowed sewage to flow into the Ottawa River. The incident was immediately reported to the appropriate parties.

Petrie Island closed on Saturday July 19th for precautionary measures.

"City staff was excellent in the way that they handled the second spill in July with the set procedures, and I hope that after the managers' intervention it will no longer be a problem," continued Coun. Monette.

But what happened in 2006 and the events after is still fresh in people's minds, said Coun. Bloess.

"We need to make sure that the information is accurate," he added. "Everyone is still riled up about what happened in 2006. Everytime a spill happens, it creates a sense of doubt and lack of integrity in our system. We are taking the

necessary steps to preserve the water quality in Ottawa."

Coun Monette added that both the municipal and federal governments are investing money to help with the city's sewage system, and hopes the province will step in as well.

Aside from renovations at ROPEC, upgrades to the sewage system include real-time monitoring and a new alarm system, which should be implemented by the end of this year.

But for Monette, he feels that all levels of government need to step up and work together to find a permanent,

long term solution.

The MOE recently laid charges against The City of Ottawa regarding the 2006 incident, and the city could face up to \$72 million in fines. The charges were laid after the MOE conducted their own investigation into the matter.

A city employee was fired over the incident after he admitting the incident was not reporter to the MOE right away.

The federal government and the city's auditor general are conducting their own investigations.

The Now EMC will have more on the charges as the story develops.

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