

Audit of the 2006 Sewage Spill

2006 Sewage Spill Reveals Management Incompetence

Ottawa, October 22, 2008 – The 2006 sewage spill, which dumped 764 million litres of raw sewage into the Ottawa River, was mainly the result of incompetent management of the City’s sewer system. This is the key finding of the Auditor General’s Audit of the 2006 Sewage Spill released today.

“The August 2006 spill was brought about by inadequate preventative maintenance and a lack of proactive management of this equipment,” states Alain Lalonde in his report. “Once the event had occurred, a culture of either not understanding, or disregarding, the significance of sewage spills took over and the event was never viewed as noteworthy,” says Mr. Lalonde.

The audit finds that legislative requirements were ignored and the managers responsible, all of them professional engineers, failed to perform the duties required of their positions. The audit goes on to identify a number of other professional staff at the City who failed to recognize the significance of the 2006 spill or the responsibility for ensuring these incidents were given proper attention. The audit also identified that an additional four unreported sewage spills have occurred since 1998 bringing the total to 16. Management has already reported two of these spills to the MOE, representing a minimum of 18 million litres. Of the two other spills, one represents approximately 165,000 litres of sewage while the other cannot be estimated, as data was not made available to the Auditor General.

The report recommends a complete overhaul of the maintenance and safety procedures and the process for monitoring of sewage flows. The report also recommends that the City consider pursuing a complaint with the Professional Engineers of Ontario concerning the professional engineering staff identified in the audit.

Finally, the audit recommends that the City re-examine and improve its communication and reporting protocols regarding legislative compliance issues across all departments to ensure that senior managers, Council and regulatory bodies are informed in a timely manner.

Management has agreed with all six recommendations contained in the audit.

The chapter **Audit of the 2006 Sewage Spill** is available on the Auditor General’s Web site at www.ottawa.ca.

Information:

Name: Lise Renaud
Telephone: 613-580-9602
E-mail: OAG@ottawa.ca