

Sewage overflow not issue here, says Murphy

By JASON MISNER
The Champion

A critical report by Ontario's Environment Commissioner Gord Miller about sewage treatment plants polluting waterways doesn't reflect regional operations, says Halton's commissioner of planning and public works.

Patrick Murphy said the report takes aim at older wastewater treatment plants that have combined storm/sewer pipes, like in Hamilton and Toronto. The concern, he said, is that kind of set up makes it possible for untreated sewage to overflow into waterways during storms.

In Halton, sanitary and storm water pipes are separated, which has been the design principle for a number of years, Mr. Murphy said.

A sewage overflow isn't an issue, he said. "Mr. Miller's concern is certainly well justified and we have to do a better job in those areas," he said.

"All of our plants have had to be upgraded from the '70s onward, and all of the plants we have not only meet but exceed considerably the standard the Ministry of the Environment has set."

Mr. Miller's report, released Thursday, lamented that Ontario's sewage treatment system was once the envy of the world.

He said in the report that many waterways connected to the Great Lakes receive significant volumes of municipal sewage treatment plant effluents.

About 38 per cent of Ontario's effluent goes into Lake Ontario.

Ponds take storm water

Mr. Murphy said the way it works in Halton is storm water is carried away through its own piping system and flushed into storm water management ponds, to avoid flooding and erosion. They're huge bodies of water constructed near subdivisions.

Through the design of the ponds, the water is cleaned of contaminants, like oil run-off, by interacting with naturally-growing plants.

As for the sewage system, the piping system is unique to itself, and each plant treats and disinfects wastewater through effective measures that are constantly under review, Mr. Murphy said.

Part of that process includes what's called an optimization review. It started a decade ago.

It reviews how a plant operates, from the time raw sewage enters the plant to when treated sewage, or effluent, is discharged into a body of water.

"I'm not sure exactly how much of the budget is devoted to sewage treatment plants specifically, but it's safe to say we have hundreds of millions of dollars on the books over the next few years to improve sewage treatment systems."

For example, at Burlington's Skyway, the Region has already maximized the existing plant capabilities by reducing the amount of phosphorus and ammonia outfall.

And in Milton, the sewage treatment plant will be undergoing \$1.4 million in upgrades next year to better handle increased sludge — as well as a proposed wastewater disinfection upgrade from chlorine to ultraviolet, which doesn't use chemicals.

— with files from Torstar

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