



# MEMORANDUM

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## LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

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**To:** Ald. Bohl  
**From:** Kathleen Brengosz – Fiscal Planning Specialist  
**Date:** March 23, 2011  
**Subject:** Downspout Disconnection – City of Minneapolis

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The City of Minneapolis has a comprehensive downspout (rain leader) disconnection program. The primary impetus for the program was the reduction of combined sewer overflows. The Program was instituted by ordinance (*Chapter 56. Prohibited Discharges to Sanitary Sewer System*) on August 1, 2003. The ordinance prohibited both new and pre-existing roof drain, area drain or other clearwater connections. All property owners (residential and commercial) were required to permanently disconnect all prohibited connections upon notice from the City or by January 1, 2005 whichever occurred first. Property inspections began in February 2003 and continued through 2007.

The inspection process focused on four key areas:

- **Priority Area Inspections** - 41 priority neighborhoods based on the 2002 Brown and Caldwell Sewer Separation Study.
- **Institutional Inspections** – Facilities owned by the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Parks and Recreation Board, Hennepin County, and the University of Minnesota
- **Public Works Street Projects** – These inspections were done in advance of planned street improvements, to allow owners to coordinate their work with street construction work.
- **Site Plan Inspections** – Inspections done in conjunction with the Public Works approval process for site plans.

Violations were divided into two categories, inflow violations which were defined as illegal connections to the sanitary sewer system; and non-inflow violations which were described as violations where disconnections had been completed in such a manner that they could easily be reconnected. Between 2003 and 2007, 103,711 parcels were inspected. A total of 5,997 violations were found. Of the 5,997 violations, 3,789 (63%) were for downspouts or open standpipes. As of March 2009, 6,131 violations had been recorded; 4,537 (74%) have become compliant, leaving 1,594 (26%) uncorrected.

Work is to be done at the property owner's expense. If the property owner fails to make an ordered disconnection, the city may elect to make the disconnection and assess the cost against the property owner. Revisions to Chapter 56 were approved in 2006 that were designed to accelerate compliance. These changes allow for the issuance of administrative citations to continuing violators. The fine is \$750 and \$1,500 for first and second violations respectively and \$2,000 for each subsequent violation. Unpaid fines may be placed on the property tax bill.

In practice, if the owner of a residential property fails to make the disconnection, the city will attempt to obtain permission from the homeowner and if successful, will make the required

<b>Minneapolis Rainleader Disconnection Program(*)</b>					
	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Neighborhoods Inspected	12	17	16	20	
Parcels Inspected	16,742	16,826	20,337	31,105	28,966
Violations					
Inflow	586	984	891	489	
Non-inflow	713	593	303	457	
Total	1,299	1,577	1,194	946	285
Violation Rate – Inflow	3.5%	5.8%	4.4%	1.6%	
Violation Rate - Overall	7.8%	9.4%	5.9%	3.0%	1.0%

(\*) As reported in Minneapolis Combined Sewer Overflow Annual Reports

disconnection. There is generally no charge for this service. Citations are typically issued for non-response (as opposed to non-compliance). If a property is brought into compliance after a citation has been issued, fines may be forgiven if they have not been officially levied against the property. In addition, a small grant was received in 2008 which was used to purchase materials which were distributed free of charge to property owners.

Funding for the rain leader disconnect program is provided by the city's storm water fund. A storm water fee is paid by Minneapolis property owners based in part on the amount of impervious surface on a property. The program operated with a staff of approximately eleven during the initial inspection period. Staffing has been reduced to five; a program manager, an administrative analyst and three inspectors. Information regarding actual costs for administering the program and the amount of the storm water fee attributable to the rain leader disconnection program was not readily available.

The city of Minneapolis determined that a large scale public education campaign at the beginning of the disconnection program would not be cost effective due to the low percentage of properties that were expected to be non-compliant. Information and educational resources were targeted to property owners who had prohibited connections. Initial compliance with notifications was relatively low. The city found it necessary in many cases to make multiple attempts to contact owners using various methods including written notifications, warning letters, site visits and citations. The highest levels of compliance were achieved when written correspondence was able to elicit a phone call from the property owner to the city.

Work must be done in accordance to all applicable state rules and Minneapolis ordinances. A disconnection permit must be obtained before work can begin. There is no charge for the permit which is valid for one year. Time extensions are available if the work is not completed prior to the expiration of the permit. Prior to January 1, 2007 a \$25 filing fee was charged for the extension. Since that date, the extension fee has been calculated using the current sewer utility rate, the area of the property contributing rainwater to the sanitary system and the average annual rainfall. (*current sewer utility rate x area contributing rainwater x average annual rainfall*) Owner occupants of single family dwellings may perform the work on that dwelling. All other work must be performed by a licensed plumbing contractor. Work must be inspected before it is concealed or covered up.

Estimates provided by the City of Minneapolis indicate that materials for disconnecting a typical single family dwelling or duplex would be less than \$20. Costs may be higher if property owners

need to purchase the required tools. Recommended tools include a hacksaw, pliers, screwdriver, hammer and tape measure. Costs for disconnecting multi-family, commercial and industrial properties were significantly higher and varied considerably.

<b>Materials</b>	<b>Approx Cost</b>	
	Minneapolis	Milwaukee
Downspout extension – steel (10 feet)	\$8.00 each	\$13.00
Downspout elbow	\$2.00 each	\$2.50
Downspout strap	\$1.00 each	\$1.50
Sheet metal screws		
Splash block (optional)		\$10.00
6 Lb bucket of quick setting cement	\$5.00 each	\$10.00 (10 lbs)
OR		
4 inch soil pipe gasket	\$2.00 each	
4 inch cast iron blind plug	\$5.50 each	\$6.00

Minneapolis has been successful in reducing the number of combined sewer overflows. However, because Minneapolis uses a multi-faceted approach to addressing overflows it is not known how much of the reduction is attributable to the rain leader disconnection program.