

# New Ken works on cutting sewage overflow

## Details

MSANK Advisory Committee

Anyone interested in serving on the Municipal Sanitary Authority of New Kensington's advisory committee should contact Kemal Niksic at [kemal.niksic@hatchmott.com](mailto:kemal.niksic@hatchmott.com).

Updates about the compliance project are posted on the authority's website at [www.msank.org](http://www.msank.org).

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Now that the Municipal Sanitary Authority of New Kensington has finished a yearlong project to record the flow of sewage through its system, it will begin to create a plan to prevent untreated sewage from escaping.

Kemal Niksic, an engineer with the firm Hatch Mott MacDonald, said the flow-monitoring that was completed in October found the authority's treatment plant processed nearly 2.2 billion gallons of sewage during the year that began in September 2011.

During the same time, an estimated 29 million gallons of a combination of sanitary and storm sewage overflowed untreated into the Allegheny River.

In addition, almost 3 million gallons of untreated sewage overflowed at its pumping stations — all primarily during heavy rains that overwhelm the system.

Although the overall average of lost sewage isn't bad, Niksic said the authority must treat at least 85 percent of the total flow during wet weather.

As an example of the problem, he noted during a particularly rainy 24-hour period last May, an average of 6.4 million gallons of sewage per hour overflowed into the river while the plant treated about 14.7 million gallons per hour. That's an overflow rate of about 45 percent.

The authority, which treats sewage for Arnold, Lower Burrell and small portions of Allegheny Township and Plum in addition to all of New Kensington, is under mandate from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection to reduce the amount of untreated sewage that overflows during wet weather.

Many area sewer systems, including Alcosan in Allegheny County and the Kiski Valley Water Pollution Control Authority, are dealing with similar requirements.

The New Kensington authority and its member communities next must submit an improvement plan to the environmental agencies by September 2014, a deadline Niksic says they will meet.

Speaking Wednesday in Lower Burrell at a public hearing on their progress, Niksic and fellow engineer Thomas Batrone said they should have a computer model of the system completed this spring.

That model will allow them to predict how effective potential improvements will be.

Niksic said they have not determined what all the improvements will be — or what they will cost.

That was alarming to Lower Burrell resident Robert Body, who was concerned about how much his sewage rates already have gone up over the years.

To fund about \$38 million in improvements already made to the treatment plant and other system components, the authority's rates have doubled over the past decade, manager Dan "Skip" Rowe said in November.

Rowe on Wednesday said he's hoping the 9 percent rate increase that went into effect this year will be the last rate hike for a few years. But he acknowledged that's likely only a temporary reprieve.

Rowe and Niksic said they plan to be very transparent about the plans and costs to bring the system into compliance. Niksic added he wants to create an advisory committee of residents, municipal leaders, environmentalists and others in the upcoming months to take suggestions and make sure everyone is aware of the plans.

By keeping everyone united, Niksic said they hope to be able to negotiate with the environmental agencies over how many improvements the community can afford. He said they will use the service area's poverty level to help determine that price tag.

He noted Alcosan's project likely would cost \$3.6 billion to become fully compliant, but they're hoping to get by with about \$2.2 billion in work that still would substantially improve the system. MSANK's improvements should not be nearly as costly because the system is much smaller.

Once the plan is submitted, Niksic said he expects it will take the EPA and DEP about a year to approve it.

"Then the clock starts ticking" for the authority and its members to make the improvements, he said.

Niksic expects the authority will have in the ballpark of 20 years to improve its system.

"We're not going to build everything in five years," Niksic said. "We've done a lot of work at the plant already."

"We've been trying to do this in phases so we don't get hit with a \$100 million bill," said Dan Felack, an authority board member. "The board has done everything we can to keep costs down."

Although worried about the cost, Body said he has seen an improvement in water quality since he was a kid swimming in the Allegheny River decades ago.

"I think we should keep the river clean," he said.

*Liz Hayes is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. She can be reached at 724-226-4680 or [lhayes@tribweb.com](mailto:lhayes@tribweb.com).*