

MARBLEHEAD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION



THE FLOW N' GO

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 3

JANUARY / FEBRUARY / MARCH 2021

ILLEGAL SUMP PUMPS TAX SEWER SYSTEM

As anyone who has ever tried digging anywhere in Marblehead soon discovers, they will eventually strike rock. Some of the Town's earliest settlers gave the name of Marble Harbor to the town because its rocky shoreline reminded them of marble.

Because Marblehead is built upon this hard rock, the ground cannot always absorb the amount of stormwater that comes with drenching rains. The rainwater seeps down through the top soil until it hits rock and has to find another place to go. And that place is very often your basement.

To cope with the water coming into their basements, residents often install a sump pump that will remove the stormwater. Where that water empties out is an important consideration.

Most homeowners will send the water out into their yard, as far away from their house as possible. Others will spill the water into the street to run into a town drain catch basin and some will connect their sump pump line directly to the town's stormwater drainage system. (See *Legal Installation of a Sump Pump* on the back page for more information on these last two options.)

There are some homeowners who have connected their sump pump to the town's sanitary sewer system by tying it in with the sewer service line in their basement. This connection is not an option—and it's illegal.

Chapter 248, Article 5, section G of the Code of the Town of Marblehead provides that, "[N]o person shall discharge surface water or roof drainage into any particular sewer or into any connection with a common sewer or underdrain of the common sewer, and no person shall directly discharge groundwater or cellar drainage into any particular sewer or connect directly with the underdrain of the common sewer."

Simply put, it is illegal to put stormwater from your basement, or from anywhere else, into the sanitary sewer system.

The reasons for this regulation are easy to understand. The town has to pay for every gallon of wastewater that it sends to the South Essex Sewerage District (SESD) plant in Salem for treatment. A single residence could possibly pump hundreds of gallons of stormwater during a storm. Multiply this by the number of potential illegal sump pump connections in town and we are talking about a large avoidable expense — a cost that is passed on to every homeowner through their sewer rates.

Discharging sump pumps into the sanitary sewer system can also put a massive strain on SESD's ability to handle the flow. The treatment facility can process only so much wastewater at a time before it becomes overburdened and is unable to handle what is being sent to it from Marblehead and the other District member communities of Beverly, Danvers, Peabody, Salem, a portion of Middleton, and a portion of Wenham.

During periods of heavy rain SESD sometimes has to limit the amount of wastewater that it can accept from these communities. This can lead to backups in the individual pump stations (and possibly homes) and could lead to some environmental issues.

That is why it is important that sump pumps not be connected to the sanitary sewer system. And if an increase in sewer rates and possible sewer backups doesn't entice you to remove any illegal connection, maybe



A RESUMP Cheer www.resump.org

- Give us a "R" **R**
- Give us an "E" **E**
- Give us a "S" **S**
- Give us an "U" **U**
- Give us a "M" **M**
- Give us a "P" **P**

What does that spell? **"RESUMP"**

What are we all cheering about? This special issue of the *Flow N' Go* kicks off the Water and Sewer Commission's campaign to educate our residents about the effects of putting sump pumps and drain connections into the sanitary sewer system. (See back page for more information.)

CONTACT INFORMATION

781 631-0102

**Marblehead.org/
waterandsewer**

Superintendent
Amy McHugh

Office Manager/Editor
Paul Jalbert

Office Location
100 Tower Way
Building #11

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 1108
Marblehead, MA 01945

(Continued on back page)

LEGAL INSTALLATION OF A SUMP PUMP

So you read *Illegal Sump Pumps Tax Sewer System* on the front page of this newsletter and have discovered that you do indeed have a sump pump in your basement that is connected to the sewer system. You figure that you had better have it removed before you get caught (and fined) by the department. You need to have the sump pump because your basement floods. What can you do?

While there are currently no regulations to require that sump pump discharges be connected to the town's storm drain system, doing so is strongly encouraged if it is feasible.

If a homeowner decides to connect their sump pump discharge line to the drain system, they must first complete a "License Agreement for Private Connection to Town Drainage System" form available from the Department of Public Works. There is a \$25.00 fee for this license.

The homeowner is responsible for all costs associated with the installation of the sump pump and subsequent connection to the drain system. The completed connection must be inspected by the drain department.

Homeowners who choose not to connect to the drain system have the responsibility to assure that the stormwater is deposited in such a manner so as not to cause any hazard or potential hazard on any public way. This includes, but is not limited to, the formation of ice from the discharge.

Article III, section 162-9 of the Town of Marblehead By-Laws provides that, "No person shall deposit or cause to be deposited any snow and/or ice on or against a fire hydrant or on any sidewalk or roadway." Section 162-10 states, "Whoever violates any section or provisions of the By-Law shall be liable to a penalty of \$50.00 for each offence."

In other words, you can't discharge stormwater onto streets or sidewalks when there is a possibility of it freezing.

Make sure to visit www.resump.org for more ideas on how to legally get rid of stormwater from your sump pump.



You have found the pom-poms from your high school days and did the RESUMP cheer from the front of this newsletter. (It isn't as easy as it once was, is it?) But just what are you cheering for?

The Marblehead Sump Redirection Program is a public outreach and education program sponsored by the Water and Sewer Commission. This program aims to educate Marblehead residents to understand the effects of private sump pump and drain connections to the sanitary sewer system and to locate these illegal connections and have them removed.

There are some homeowners who have connected their sump pump, floor drains, or downspouts to the town's sanitary sewer system by tying it in with the sewer service line in their basement. This puts stress on the sanitary sewer system and can cause issues that are easily avoidable—and it's illegal.

Excess unnecessary flow in the sewers can cause backups, overflows, and high sewer treatment costs. The sewer department regularly inspects the public sewer system for sources of excess flow, but private sources can be difficult to identify.

The goals of the RESUMP campaign are to **R**esult all residents to review their sanitary sewer connections; **E**ducate residents to identify sources of excess flow on their property; **S**tudy the impact of these flows on the sewer system; **U**nderstand how they can provide input for capital improvement projects; **M**otivate residents to confirm that their connection is legal; and **P**rovide the ability to report illegal connections.

You will read and hear much more about this through the *Flow N' Go* and local media in the months ahead. In the meantime, you can visit a special website dedicated to this program. Go to www.resump.org today for further information on our sump pump redirection campaign.

DISCHARGING SUMP PUMP INTO SEWER SYSTEM IS PUNISHABLE BY FINE

(Continued from front page)

the penalty for violating this regulation will. Marblehead Water and Sewer Commission Rules and Regulations Section 248-27(B) states, "[A]ny person who shall continue any violation . . . shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, on conviction thereof, shall be fined in the amount not exceeding \$20 for each violation. Each day in which any such violation shall continue shall be deemed a separate offense."

How do we find out if a homeowner (or an owner before them) has illegally connected their sump pump into the sewer system? Without giving away any trade secrets, these are usually found during inspections or when installing a new water meter or valve.

The water department conducts an inspection whenever ownership of a property is transferred. An illegal sump pump connection is one of the things that we look for. They are also discovered

when we do sewer deduct meter inspections and when we change out the water meter or install a new valve.

If you know your sump pump is connected to the sewer system, you should report it to us and have it capped by a licensed plumber. Initially, no fines will be levied on those who self-report.

So what are your other options? See *Legal Installation of a Sump Pump* (above) or go to www.resump.org for how to legally connect a sump pump.