

Annual water/wastewater policy review is needed

Ordinances are the backbone of any size water or sewer system. Ordinance is described in Webster's New World Dictionary as "an authoritative degree or law: a municipal regulation." As a city council member and former utility superintendent, I know that cities need to review ordinances at least once a year to make sure they are current.

As reviews are made of ordinances the first few pages will most likely be the definitions used. These will define the differences between a building drain and a building sewer for example. It will also define the difference between "shall" which is mandatory and "may" which is permissive. These definitions will

help follow through the ordinance with few questions. If there are questions, a closer look should be made at that section as changes may be needed to better describe the section or idea.

Sometimes an ordinance will refer to other ordinances such as building or plumbing codes, public offenses or health and welfare items.

It's likely that many communities have ordinances that have been in effect since original systems were installed. In many cases, 40 years or more may have passed without the city reviewing or updating these utility

ordinances. Systems that are planning an upgrade to treatment facilities and have not reviewed ordinances may be required to do so by the Kansas Dept. of Health and Environment (KDHE).

In reviewing ordinances updated around 1987, I noted discussion of "combined sewers."

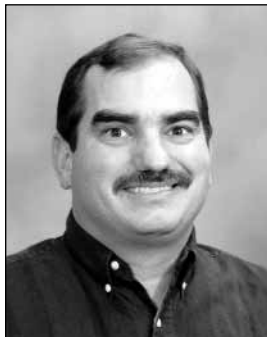
roof run off, sump pumps and other connections discharging into the sanitary sewer system.

That same section should also describe more substances that are not allowed to be discharged to the sanitary sewer system, such as grease, fats, oils and garbage that has not been properly shredded.

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Combined sewers receive both surface runoff and sewage. These need to be described but should have an Article, and then sections, to define prohibited connections. Prohibited connections would include storm water, surface water,


The last line describes problems I find in many cities throughout the state. They have ordinances against these types of discharge – but they do little to enforce them. The concern is to not lose the businesses. That's



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understandable – but pre-treatment is an option, as many larger cities require. There are milk, candy, and even salad factories in communities of less than 7,000 and most are less than 4,000 in population. Most small communities have a locker, kill or butcher plant that processes beef, swine and deer. Pre-treatment of wastewater may be very appropriate for these facilities. A city may want to require the waste to be monitored for high BOD/TSS. Some wastewater utilities monitor for BOD/TSS. They may charge customers per pound over normal domestic waste which is usually about 300 ppm BOD and 350 ppm TSS. This can be part of the ordinances that take care of the service charge to customers. The reason for a charge is that your treatment facilities are designed for the treatment of the waste and those that have higher BOD/TSS need more treatment and result in higher cost to the system for processing the waste.

Fair and equitable charges

The user fees/service charges generally are in the next article of the ordinance. Fees should be reviewed annually to ensure that the utility is operating with some profit. Some utilities have not increased rates since construction of the system; many charge less than \$10 per month. I had a councilperson tell me, “They are not in the business to make money.” I know my mouth fell open, as I could not believe what I was hearing. This was after the council voted to spend over \$100,000 for a sewer expansion for a subdivision and did not want to raise rates. A city or rural water district is a business and systems should charge a fair fee for a fair service. It is also a good idea to keep the utility funds separate because too many cities put all their eggs (money) into one basket. Then when money is needed because the lift station pumps need to be replaced, the basket is empty, because the city

purchased a new fire truck or playground equipment.

Sewer system extensions – who pays?

How do communities fund extensions to sewer systems? Many city ordinances have required that developer be responsible for cost of extending a sanitary sewer system, with the city paying for any extensions to the water system. Some systems have just one customer wanting to build just outside the city and connect to the sanitary sewer and water. The connection is usually allowed with the signing of the consent to annexation. Even if its years down the road, if the city wants to annex the property they can. This may be difficult with water since so many systems abut each other, but with a good working relationship it should workout well for all involved.

Connections

Most systems have an ordinance or policy about where



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customer's service responsibility and the city's system begin. In most cases the system's responsibility is at the main. It may include the tap, but it may not. I believe that the best is for the city to maintain the collection system including the tap. Everything from the tap back is the customer's. This allows the city to tap the main and maintain integrity. When the service needs to be replaced it is usually the customer's responsibility to excavate the line to and including over the main. Some systems prefer to excavate over the main again to protect its integrity.

Party Lines

One of the most difficult problems I ever have ever dealt with is called a "party line," that is when two customers served by one building sewer was allowed. This is because someone decided to install only one service line, likely to reduce costs. Now, when a sewer backs up or the line needs to be cleaned, there's a dispute between

the two customers over costs of the repair. In our case, we made each one bring a new line to the main and used the old tap for one and provided a new tap for the other at no charge other than the inspection fee. This ends that problem but if there is an easement dispute, that's another issue. We had a water service that went through three homes and provided for each meter inside. For this we provided new service lines down the parking to the meter pits and then required the property owners to connect to them. I was surprised that this went so smoothly, but it was explaining the reason that made it that way.

Easements

Easements for public sewers/water through private land need to be thought out very carefully. Access to manholes and lift stations should be readily accessible, without having to move a storage shed from over a manhole or fighting a dog inside an eight foot privacy fence. With systems that regularly maintain the sewer

system with routine cleaning, having access for machines should be rigidly enforced. For new subdivisions, have a discussion with the developer and engineer to reduce or eliminate access issues.

I encourage operators and city councils, administrators to attend the upcoming KRWA conference. Watch for the sessions below to help you with your wastewater utility.



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The 39th Annual Conference & Exhibition provides an excellent opportunity for operators, managers and governing body members to learn more about water quality issues.

Tuesday, March 28:

- *Advanced Rate Setting Strategies to Fix Your Finances*
- *Wastewater Stabilization Lagoons: Operations and Maintenance to Provide Maximum Treatment and Longevity*
- *Managing Safety Programs for Water and Wastewater Utilities: Ideas for Improvement*

Wednesday, March 29

- *State Revolving Funds: Water & Wastewater Funding Options*
- *Wastewater Life Station Maintenance*
- *Wastewater Issues: A to Z*
- *Optimizing Sanitary Sewer Collection Systems*

Thursday, March 30

- *Confined Space Monitoring for Entry Using 4-Gas Monitors*
- *Certified Wastewater Operator Forum*
- *To Dig or Not to Dig – Kansas Style*

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