

# Project Background

The Oneida County Sewer District (OCSD) Sanitary Sewer Overflow Mitigation Project is a multi-year initiative designed to reduce overflows into the Mohawk River during wet weather events.

With the guidance of a Steering Committee composed of representatives from each city, town, and village within the district, the project has achieved the following tasks since its inception in 2007:

- ◆ Engineering investigations to determine sanitary sewer problems, repairs and upgrades
- ◆ Identification of funding to enable repairs
- ◆ Ongoing sewer system repairs and upgrades to reduce infiltration and inflow (I/I)
- ◆ Planning and design of major upgrades to increase pumping and treatment capacity



**Operation Ripple Effect** is the consumer-focused project campaign that highlights how individual actions add up to widespread improvements for the system and the Mohawk River.

From 2014-2015, the project team implemented a number of high-profile activities to promote Operation Ripple Effect, including public events, presentations, advertising and commercial displays.

Oneida County and OCSD member municipalities are keenly aware of the cost implications associated

with repairing the sanitary sewer system. However, by discharging diluted raw sewage into the Mohawk River, we are potentially damaging the natural ecosystem and limiting our future generation's ability to enjoy the resource that helped develop the Mohawk Valley.

In addition to impacting the river, if these overflows are not reduced, Oneida County faces harsh fines that would place a severe burden on local residents and hinder future regional economic development.



# OPERATION Ripple Effect™

**SIMPLE STEPS: BIG BENEFITS FOR THE MOHAWK RIVER**

Oneida County Sewer District

## Public Awareness Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Measuring Effectiveness

It is critical that residents understand their role in helping to reduce sanitary sewer overflows into the Mohawk River.

Outreach activities through 2015 have been focused primarily on management and support of the Steering Committee and Working Groups. This included the development and production of education materials for municipal use, such as project bulletins and newsletter articles. Starting in 2015, the outreach program expanded to include more direct-to-consumer messaging, including Operation Ripple Effect™.

The goal of this survey, conducted in January 2016, was to gather baseline awareness data to further inform the residential education program, and measure success over time.

*Results of the survey show that there already is significant awareness of the problem, and growing recognition of ways to help reduce sanitary sewer overflows.*

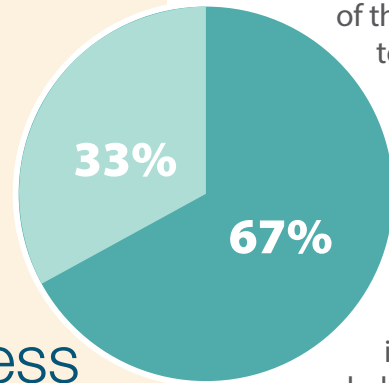


## SURVEY SCOPE

The following survey results were obtained through a live landline and cell phone survey of 250 residents in the nine consent order municipalities (within the towns of New Hartford, Paris and Whitestown in Oneida County, New York). The interviews were conducted January 12 and 13, 2016. This survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.2% at the 95% confidence interval.

### Overall Awareness

● Familiar ● Not Familiar

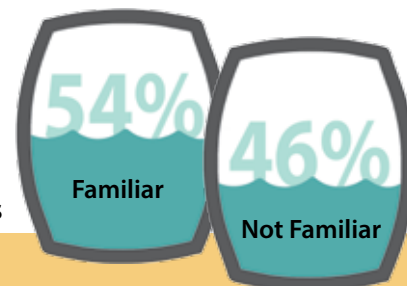


## Key Findings

- ◆ The general awareness level of the “wet weather” causes of wastewater being discharged into the Mohawk River is strong for this phase in the program, with 67% of all residents being familiar with the causes and 33% being not too familiar or not familiar at all.
- ◆ Overall, male residents are more familiar and informed than female residents about the causes of the wastewater overflows, the solutions to remedy the problem, and the laws prohibiting illegal discharges into the sewer system. About 30% percent of the total population is not familiar at all with the overflow causes and prevention measures regarding sanitary sewer issues. The 35 to 44 age demographic is the least informed on all issues and prevention measures. This data helps to inform outreach efforts, which will target the least informed demographics.
- ◆ Four messages were tested on how best to encourage residents to take action and stop their rain gutters or sump pumps from draining into the system. In the opinion of 40% of respondents, the most effective is that “It is the right thing to do for your community and future generations.” The second most effective message was the warning of potential fines and not complying with the law, which was the top choice for 27% of respondents. This data is highly valuable in developing effective messaging.
- ◆ Among all respondents, 28% were familiar with the “rain barrel” and “rain garden” solutions to eliminate overflows, and 26% were somewhat familiar. Overall, 32% of respondents were not familiar at all with these solutions. The most uninformed population groups include 38% of female residents and 39% of seniors, aged 65 and older. This data helps to target outreach activities so that the right message aligns with the key audience.

### Rain Barrel

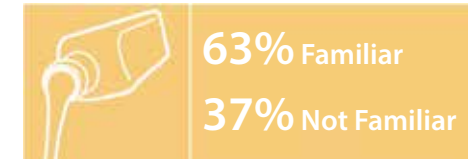
Solution to eliminate overflows



- ◆ Nearly half, 44%, of respondents were familiar with the fact that cooking fats and oils contribute to sewer blockages and problems, and 20% were not familiar at all with this fact. The awareness that flushable wipes contribute to sewer blockage problems was slightly lower than the awareness for cooking fats and oils. Among all respondents, 38% were familiar with the fact that flushable wipes can cause problems, while 26% were not familiar at all with the fact that they cause problems. This tells us that fats, oils and grease (FOG) outreach efforts are working. In addition, the wipes education program, a more recent endeavor, will need additional attention over the next year.

### Cooking Oil

Sewer blockages & problems



### Flushable Wipes

Sewer blockages & problems

57% Familiar 43% Not Familiar

- ◆ Among the media options to choose from, 40% of residents prefer to be informed through local TV ads, 21% by the local newspaper, 19% through social media and 7% through local internet news sites or blogs. Only 6% would prefer to be informed through local radio, while 5% stated that they would prefer to receive a direct-mail piece. This information has served to guide the development of our 2016 outreach activities plan.
- ◆ Just under half of all respondents, 46%, were either familiar or somewhat familiar with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation consent order requiring the Oneida County Sewer District to complete repairs by 2021 . Again, male respondents were more familiar with the legal action than female respondents by a margin of 14 points. Among all male respondents, 54% were familiar or somewhat familiar with the legal action compared to 38% of female respondents. This tells us that residents identify more closely with the program than the enforcement action.



## CONCLUSION

While fewer residents are aware of the use of rain barrels and rain gardens as a solution, the additional data regarding communication preferences will help deliver those messages in an effective manner. The high level of overall project awareness can be attributed to public information dissemination by engaged Steering Committee and Work Group members.

