



Oneida County Sewer District

# PUBLIC AWARENESS SURVEY

2019  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Measuring Effectiveness

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.

National engineering data shows that as much as 50% of the stormwater that enters the system comes from roof leaders, sump pumps, and cracked laterals from private properties. It is critical that residents understand their role in helping to reduce sanitary sewer overflows into the Mohawk River.

A survey was conducted in January 2016 to identify the baseline awareness levels for this initiative. The goal of this survey, conducted in the fourth quarter of 2018, was to gather comparative data to measure success over time, as well as identify areas that need additional emphasis for public information.

*Results of the survey show that recognition of ways to help reduce sanitary sewer overflows continues to grow.*



OPERATION  
*Ripple Effect*™

[rippleeffectocsd.org](http://rippleeffectocsd.org)

*An Initiative of the Oneida County Sewer District*

# 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). This survey has a margin of error of +/- 6.2% at the 95% confidence interval.

Overall Awareness **66%**  
Familiar or somewhat familiar



## KEY FINDINGS

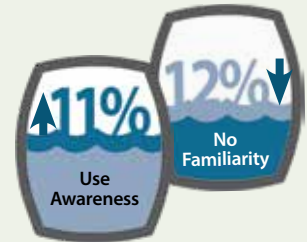
- ◆ The awareness level of the “wet weather” causes of wastewater being discharged into the Mohawk River has remained strong, with **66%** of residents now being **familiar** or somewhat familiar **with the causes**.

**2018 55%** Familiar or somewhat familiar  
**5%** Increase since 2016

- ◆ There is a 5% increase in the number of survey participants who show understanding that runoff from homes into the sewer system is illegal. It **is illegal** for rain gutters and sump pumps **to discharge water** into the Oneida County **sanitary sewer system**.

## Rain Barrel & Rain Garden

Solutions to eliminate overflows



- ◆ **Awareness** of the use of rain barrels and rain gardens to eliminate sewer system overflows into the Mohawk River **has increased 11%**. Furthermore, the number of respondents with no familiarity of solutions decreased by 12%.
- ◆ Similar to 2016, **male residents** are still **more familiar** and more informed than female respondents about the causes and solutions of wastewater overflow. This data has helped to inform outreach efforts going forward, which includes increasing communication with the least informed demographic groups.
- ◆ Unlike in 2016—where those aged 35-44 were the least informed on all issues and prevention measures—there is not one age group that tends to be less informed than the others. This can likely be attributed to the success of the Operation Ripple Effect™ School Program, which **teaches** 5th grade **students** within the nine municipalities how their families can take simple steps **to help reduce sanitary sewer overflows** into the Mohawk River.

What is the most effective way of persuading someone to act?	2016	2018
<b>It's the right thing to do for community and future</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>29%</b>
It is illegal	13%	20%
Likely leads to fine for not complying with the law	27%	19%
It is polluting the Mohawk River	10%	8%
Don't know / Refused	10%	24%

- ◆ Regarding the question, **“What is the most effective way of persuading someone to act?”** there were several shifts in responses. In this latest survey, the top three responses were that it is the right thing to do for the community; it is illegal; and that there is a fine. However, it is the **right thing to do for the community** was still the **top response** among the choices.



## Cooking Oil

Sewer blockages & problems

**2018 67% Familiar or somewhat familiar**  
**4% Increase since 2016**

- ◆ 67% of residents were familiar or somewhat familiar with the fact that cooking fats and oils contribute to sewer blockages and problems, a 4% increase from the 2016 survey.

## Flushable Wipes

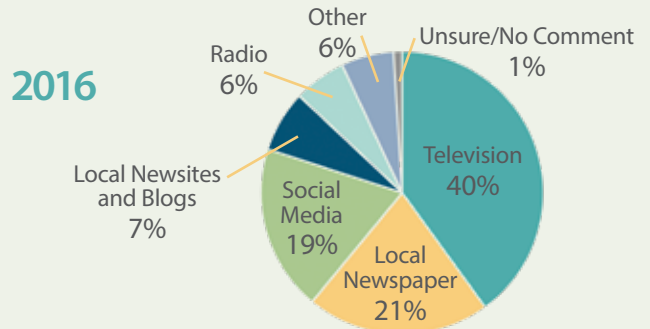
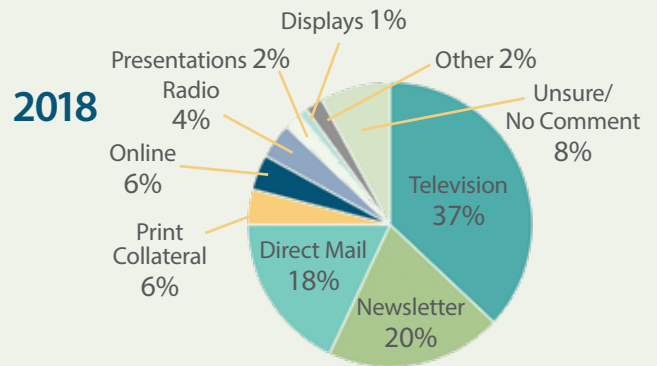
Sewer blockage problems

**2018 61% Familiar or somewhat familiar**  
**3% Increase since 2016**



- ◆ When discussing the awareness that flushable wipes contribute to sewer blockage problems, 61% of residents were familiar or somewhat familiar of this fact—a **3% increase in awareness**.

- ◆ The top preference for receiving information regarding Operation Ripple Effect™ is local television, followed by a town newsletter and direct mail pieces. These results differ from 2016, where the top three choices were local television, local newspapers and social media. This information continues to inform the community outreach activities plan.



## CONCLUSION

*The Operation Ripple Effect™ program started with a strong base of awareness in 2016 due to grassroots education efforts. Education activities throughout the past two years—such as news articles, mass media placements, the implementation of the school program, and increased presentations—have helped to build upon the baseline for a higher level of overall project recognition, including understanding of what actions can be taken to help alleviate overflows. The information in this survey serves as a guide to inform the future outreach and education plans for this program.*

# 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 community education program that highlights how individual actions add up to widespread improvements for the system and the Mohawk River.

To date, the project team has conducted numerous programs to promote Operation Ripple Effect, which includes public events, presentations, media coverage 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.