

Sewage spill could cost Greater Vancouver district \$110,000

Waste water overflow off Stanley Park was due to system blockage

BY KIM PEMBERTON, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 13, 2014



The Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District pleaded guilty this week to a violation under the Fisheries Act for dumping the untreated waste water into waters frequented by fish — in this case, into the waters off Brockton Point (above) from the Chilco Pump Station.

Photograph by: Stuart Davis, PNG

VANCOUVER --[Spilling 650 cubic metres of raw sewage into the waters off Stanley Park will likely cost the Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District \\$110,000.](#)

[The district pleaded guilty this week to a violation under the Fisheries Act for dumping the untreated waste water into waters frequented by fish — in this case, into the waters off Brockton Point from the Chilco Pump Station.](#)

[The district agreed to pay a fine of \\$5,000 and to contribute \\$105,000 to Environment Canada's Environmental Damages Fund, which supports rehabilitation projects.](#)

[North Vancouver City Mayor Mussatto, who is also chair of the Metro Vancouver Utilities Commission, said the amounts were proposed by the defendant and crown counsel, but they still have to be approved by the judge, who will hold a sentencing hearing on April 4.](#)

["This is quite unusual that this has happened," said Mussatto Thursday, adding steps were taken in operational procedures to ensure it doesn't happen again.](#)

The spill, which occurred in July 2011, was one of the four or five raw sewage spills that occur every year from the district's system into local waters.

But unlike most other spills, which happen when too much rainfall causes an overload of the sewage system, this overflow was on a dry day, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when staff were busy training and weren't able to respond immediately, said Mussatto.

"In this case the pump became blocked by items that shouldn't be in the sewage system — baby wipes, disposable clothes, feminine hygiene products that clump together and form a big mass," he said.

"The alarms went off, but we weren't able to respond for a couple of hours so the backup pumps pumped the overflow into Burrard Inlet. The district has admitted liability."

He said for the most part the Iona Treatment Plant can handle both the sewage and storm rainwater coming together in the pipes, but ideally these two should not be combined. Environment Canada has agreed with the district's remedial plan to improve the system by separating the pipes, a project that won't be completed until 2050, he said.

"It's a very expensive project to dig up all the streets and separate the pipes. Vancouver is spending \$40 million annually to separate them," he said.

The Georgia Strait Alliance, which in the past has taken the district to court unsuccessfully to try to stop waste water pollution, said they would like to see the pipe improvement system finished by 2020.

Alliance executive director Christianne Wilhelmson said only one per cent of the pipes are being fixed annually.

"Metro Vancouver would like nothing more than to fix the pipes but they can only do it at a modest rate every year," said Wilhelmson. "Unfortunately, this (fixing the pipes) is a very slow process limited by finances," she said.

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