



## Repairing flood damage at Southerly sewage treatment plant: Whatever happened to ...?

Published: Sunday, November 27, 2011, 12:00 PM Updated: Sunday, November 27, 2011, 4:08 PM



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By

*"Whatever happened to . . .?" is a weekly series updating some of the most newsworthy and interesting local stories covered in The Plain Dealer. Have a suggestion on a story we should update? Send it to **John C. Kuehner**.*

*Today, we answer this question:*

**Whatever happened to repairing the damage at the Southerly sewage treatment after heavy rains and melting snow on March 3 sent a torrent of wastewater to the plant at a rate more than twice its maximum capacity?**



Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

The flooded screen building at the Southerly sewage treatment plant in Cuyahoga Heights with several feet of water pouring out the doors.

Less than 10 months after the plant was hit in just a few hours by the wall of wastewater -- 1.5 billion gallons of sewage mixed with storm water -- nearly "every single piece of equipment has been repaired or replaced," said George Schur, Southerly's superintendent.

The plant, which treats about half the waste generated by Cleveland and the 61 communities in the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, sits on the Cuyahoga River in Cuyahoga Heights

Additionally, sewer district officials have revamped the plant's emergency plan, trying to prepare for another "perfect storm" they hope will never come.

The cost of the March 3 flood: About \$1.5 million so far and that's expected to climb to as high as \$1.7 million by the time the books are closed on the incident.

The good news is that nearly all of the expenses were covered by the plant's insurance, excluding about \$50,000 to \$100,000, officials said.

The **flooding began about 3 a.m. March 3**, when melting snow and heavy rain combined for widespread flooding throughout Northeast Ohio.

By sunlight, a seemingly endless torrent of several feet of water, with nowhere else to go, poured through the doors in Southerly's screen building, where a massive raking system captures large debris in the first step of the treatment process.

In a dramatic move to ease pressure on the plant, sewer district officials, for the first time that anyone could remember, opened up two of their giant interceptor lines, releasing roughly 127 million gallons of wastewater local creeks.

At Southerly, the wastewater was 12 feet high in some of the tunnels, knocking out sludge pumps and destroying electrical systems.

The water rose to within three-quarters of an inch of spilling into a substation that houses the plant's main utility lines, those that supply the power and house the control systems for the entire plant.

A loss of these systems would have been catastrophic, officials said, and likely brought down the plant for weeks, resulting in the discharge of billions of gallons of untreated waste into the Cuyahoga River.

Schur credited the efforts of more than 100 employees, many of whom worked without rest for days, with containing the damage and getting the plant up and running later on March 3. Southerly was back at full capacity within a month.

"What the flood showed was that we could run things differently to help us cope with situations in the future," Schur said. "So we have things in place to help us with this. The only problem is if we get hit with that much water again, there's really no place for it to go."

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