

June 30, 2006

Mr. Dan Blaisdell, P.E.
Assistant Chief, Engineering Branch
Construction Grants and Loans Section
North Carolina Division of Water Quality
1633 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1633

Ms. Cyndi Karoly
North Carolina Division of Water Quality
1650 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1650

Mr. Monte Matthews
Raleigh Regulatory Field Office
6508 Falls of Neuse Road, Suite 120
Raleigh, NC 27615

Dear Messrs. Blaisdell & Matthews,
Ms. Karoly:

This letter is in response to the Western Wake Partners draft EIS to construct a sewage plant in New Hill.

The June 30 edition of The News & Observer reports that Cary's latest sewage spill dumped 7.9 million gallons of raw sewage into Swift Creek, Lake Wheeler, and Lake Benson.

7.9 million gallons of raw sewage that is now polluting the Triangle area, and Cary wants to blame it on a large amount of rain. Well, excuse me, but the other towns within Wake County had the same amount of rain, and I have not read or heard about them having a sewage spill.

Rather than Cary blaming others, they should look into their own management of the situation and place the blame exactly where it lies, with Town of Cary employees.

The timeline of the referenced News & Observer article states:

Mimi Kelly ❖ 3020 Olive Farm Road ❖ Apex, NC 27502

JUNE 16: Engineers monitoring the pump station project for Cary say a wall in the excavated hole is crumbling. They send the contractor, Laughlin-Sutton Construction Company, an e-mail saying that the "slope failure ... presents a concern for the ongoing work."

So Cary notices a problem on June 16 and sends the contractor an email stating the "slope failure presents a concern for the ongoing work". Now that is really managing a potential problem.

Sending the contractors an email shows no concern on Cary's part. Does no one in Cary care enough to pick up the telephone and demand an immediate meeting at the site to show the contractor the problem?

Does no one in Cary care enough to follow-up on the problem to ensure it is being managed? The next entry in the timeline is June 23, a full week later. What took place during that week? Why were not meetings called, discussions held, and the problem resolved? Did Cary employees think their one email had fixed everything?

In my opinion, the Town of Cary is the direct cause of the sewage spill because they took no action to resolve the problem other than sending one email. This is incompetence at its highest, and clearly shows the Town of Cary is incompetent at managing sewage plants and their resulting sewage spills.

A raw sewage spill of this magnitude also calls into question the Western Wake Partners plan of building a regional sewage plant. If one sewage plant in Cary can spill 7.9 million gallons of raw sewage, imagine the amount of raw sewage a regional plant will spill.

The Western Wake Partners should not be allowed to build a regional plant, but must be required to treat sewage in their own towns, close to where the sewage is generated, then pump treated effluent to a discharge facility. Had this been done, Cary's 7.9 million raw sewage spill would have only spilled treated effluent, and the damage to the environment would have been minimal.

Sincerely,

Attachments

Mimi Kelly ❖ 3020 Olive Farm Road ❖ Apex, NC 27502

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Cary spill totals 7.9 million gallons

The town raises its estimate of the sewage that polluted Swift Creek and two lakes

DAVID BRACKEN AND TOBY COLEMAN,
Staff Writers

Cary now reports that about 7.9 million gallons of sewage spilled into Swift Creek while engineers struggled to deal with a broken pipe at a pump station.

The revised total makes the spill the third-largest in the Triangle in the past decade. The spill has closed Lake Wheeler and Lake Benson to boaters and fishermen for a week. Raleigh officials continue to test both lakes for bacteria but say the earliest they could open is Saturday.

Earlier Cary had estimated the spill, which began last Friday night and ended Wednesday morning, at just over 3 million gallons. Officials said Thursday that the fleet of tanker trucks the town brought in to haul waste around the trouble spot could not keep up.

"The trucks didn't haul all the waste," said Susan Moran, a Cary spokeswoman. "We were

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BIGGEST N.C. SEWAGE SPILLS SINCE 1995

1. Roanoke Rapids, 14 million gallons, September 1999
2. Raleigh, 9 million gallons, December 2002
3. Laurinburg, 8 million gallons, February 1998
4. Durham, 8 million gallons, May 2006
5. Cary, 7.9 million gallons, June 2006

N.C. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES, TOWN OF CARY

TIMELINE

able to divert 68 percent, but not all of it."

The potential damage to two popular recreation spots has angered nearby residents and regular users of the lakes. The spill started after mudslides caved in a hole contractors had dug in an expansion project at the pump station.

A look at other large sewage spills in the Triangle over the past decade shows that they occur for many reasons and that operators are rarely fined for problems they may encounter.

Just last month, the city of Durham reported an 8-million-gallon sewage spill. A 21-inch sewer line collapsed in a remote area behind the Nello Teer Quarry, and officials didn't find out until a resident reported it 13 days later.

Susan Massengale, the public information officer for the state's Division of Water Quality, said the agency agreed with Durham's conclusion that most of the sewage spilled into a wooded area and only a small amount reached the Eno River.

JUNE 14: Remnants of Tropical Storm Alberto flood the Swift Creek pump station on Holly Springs Road. A hole where the town plans to put an addition to the pump station fills with water.

JUNE 16: Engineers monitoring the pump station project for Cary say a wall in the excavated hole is crumbling. They send the contractor, Laughlin-Sutton Construction Company, an e-mail saying that the "slope failure ... presents a concern for the ongoing work."

JUNE 23: About 5:15 p.m., after a heavy rain, a wall of the excavated hole collapses and twists an underground pipe out of place. Cary's emergency system begins to call town utility workers.

JUNE 23: About 7:30 p.m., sewage begins to spill into Swift Creek at a rate of 200,000 gallons an hour as workers scramble to reconnect the pipe.

JUNE 24: In the morning, Raleigh parks officials decide to close Lake Benson and Lake Wheeler, two recreational lakes fed by Swift Creek, until bacteria tests can be done. They have remained closed to boaters and anglers since.

JUNE 24: About noon, crews reattach pipe to pump station. The fix doesn't hold, and the pipe blows off again. Sewage shoots across Holly Springs Road momentarily, then resumes spilling into Swift Creek.

JUNE 24: That evening, to try to stem the spill, Cary officials hire a fleet of tanker trucks to haul sewage. Truckers pick up wastewater at the pumpstation, drive a couple of miles downstream and pour it back into the sewer system through open manholes.

JUNE 25: Cary's leaders determine that they cannot replace the pump station's broken pipe because the soil around it is too unstable. They begin searching for temporary pumps that will allow them to pipe sewage around the pump station while they build a new pipe.

JUNE 28: At 5:15 a.m., the sewage spill ends as the town starts piping sewage through a temporary system that bypasses the broken Swift Creek pump station.

TOWN OF CARY

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Steve Miller, assistant superintendent for Durham's water and sewer maintenance division, said beaver dams nearby helped contain the spill. The cleanup effort has involved pumping out the waste, removing soil and checking the rest of the line for problems. The Division of Water Quality has yet to determine what action it will take against Durham, Massengale said.

Other large spills in the Triangle have been caused by severe weather. The largest in the past decade occurred in December 2002 in Raleigh. An ice storm cut power to one of the city's lift stations, which ultimately caused 9 million gallons of sewage to reach Walnut Creek. In March 1998, a pump station in southwest Durham County failed and quickly flooded with sewage, leading to a 6-million-gallon spill.

Glen Whisler, the Durham County engineer, said the pump station was in a flood-prone area and has been closed. Whisler said his biggest concern is the collection of fats and grease in sewer pipes, which reduces their capacity and causes blockages.

In September 2005, a deer carcass stuck in a sewer line in Clayton's system, resulting in a 1.8-million-gallon sewage spill into Little Creek. The town wasn't fined.

"We're not really sure how it got in there," said Byron Poelman, Clayton's public works superintendent.

In recent years, Massengale said, the state has tried to tie regular maintenance requirements to its permit process for sewer

- Bill targets teen drinkers
- For a life taken, a lifetime in jail
- Holiday travelers flowing with gas prices
- Man is shot, thrown on road
- Captains sail tall ships to Beaufort
- Cary spill totals 7.9 million gallons

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operators. As sewer lines age, she said, they become more susceptible to damage from shifting ground or tree roots.

As for fines, Massengale said that in the past, the division didn't levy fines if an operator responded quickly, because it was trying to encourage the reporting of spills.

Last year, the state took the rare action of fining both Elizabeth City and Wilmington more than \$50,000 because of sewage spills. Massengale said the division is starting to demand that sewer systems do more to address problems before spills bring them to light.

Staff writer David Bracken can be reached at 829-4548 or dbracken@newsobserver.com.

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