

City gets a 'C' on how it handles sewage disposal

BY DANIEL NOLAN

Heavy rainfalls from 2005 storms are being cited as the reason Hamilton got just a passing grade from a high-profile environmental group on how the city manages sewage.

Thirty-five per cent of Hamilton's sewers handle both sewage and storm water and they were overwhelmed during storms last summer. On July 26, 22 millimetres of rain fell on parts of Hamilton in an hour.

The city has a \$1.1-billion plan to deal with storms and to stop sewage from going into Hamilton Harbour, including work at the Woodward Waste Water Treatment Plant. But it's not to come on stream until 2012.

The Sierra Legal Defence Fund, in its first Great Lakes Sewage report card, gave Hamilton a C grade and rated it 13th out of 20 communities on both sides of the border. The top was Green Bay, Wis., with a B+, and the worst was Detroit, with a D.

Hamilton's senior director of water and wastewater Jim Harnum was disappointed. He said the grade was based on stats for 2005 when the storms hit.

"2005 was a wet year, so they may be taking that into account. When it rains, we see four or five times the (water) volume come to our plant and we can't handle that volume. We can do one of two things. We can let the plant flood or let basements flood, or we can discharge that sewage into the harbour."

The city has just entered the environmental assessment phase for a \$1.5-billion plan to deal with bad weather, growth, effluent and old pipes. Harnum said \$500 million is proposed to go toward aging infrastructure.

"I think you'll see that mark go up as they see us progressing," he added.

The Fund said it gave a C grade to Hamilton because it still has secondary treatment at Woodward, as opposed to world-class tertiary sewage treatment systems that reduce sewage to clear water. It estimated the city has to deal with 4.6-billion litres of untreated discharges going into the harbour per year.

dnolan@thespec.com

905-526-3351