

Raw sewage streams into harbour

BY PAUL MORSE

Millions of litres of rain runoff and sewage gushed untreated into the harbour yesterday as a major storm overwhelmed Hamilton's water treatment system.

For the first time in its history, the Woodward wastewater treatment plant was forced to turn on its eighth and final pump.

Water and wastewater director Jim Harnum said the storm forced about 1.6 billion litres of wastewater through the city's sanitary system in just eight hours. The Woodward Avenue plant handles an average 400 million litres of wastewater per day. Its maximum capacity is 600 million litres per day. After that, runoff and sewage bypass the plant and spill into the harbour.

The system is designed to avoid widespread sewer backups into the basements of homes.

"It will take days before we know how much" bypassed the treatment plant, Harnum said.

The city has alerted the Ministry of Environment according to bypass protocols, he said.

"A short duration bypass into a large body of water like the harbor has very little environmental impact," Harnum said. He added much of the sewage that was bypassed had still received preliminary treatment which removes gross material such as sticks, sand, grit and plastics.

John Hall, co-ordinator of the Hamilton Harbor's Remedial Action Plan, agreed that, given the volume of water in the harbour, the impact would not likely be significant. He said the frequency of such events would be the real measure of harm.

pmorse@thespec.com

905-526-3434

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