

BACTERIA IN OUR STREAMS



Cooking oil, grease or trash that is thrown or flushed down sanitary sewer drains causes clogs and overflows. The untreated sewage can flow into our waterways and cause harm to public health and wildlife.

If an overflow happens, the City will flush the stream with clean water while pumping the dirty water into the sewer system until all the solids are removed and water quality is back to normal.



In 2009, there were 43 sewer overflows in the City of Durham. Since then, there have been 362 (public and private) overflows reported .

New research has shown that some bacteria can linger in a stream system by attaching to sediments.

Research

Two sewer spills were monitored weekly for seven weeks.

Samples were taken of both the sediment and the water in the streams.

Results

The current methods of cleaning a sewer spill are not getting rid of all the fecal bacteria and E. coli in the stream sediments. They can stay in the sediment for several weeks. A heavy rainfall will stir up the sediment and help the bacteria grow and move to other locations.

Streams with bottoms made of silt or fine sand are particularly at risk because the bacteria like to attach to these types of sediment.

After a rainfall, runoff from city streets flows into the streams through the storm drains. Because the runoff contains pollution, the bacteria levels were higher after a rain event.

The Department of Water Management has been updating and repairing the sanitary sewer system and the number of sewage spills has decreased.