

Statement  
Lydia J. Reid, Mayor  
Mansfield, Ohio  
April 30, 2001

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information relating to potential required expansion of our wastewater treatment plant. The City of Mansfield Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) service area includes 55,000 people along with business and industry. Sewer service is provided by a separate sanitary system and the wastewater is treated in a 12 MGD WWTP before discharge to the Rocky Fork of the Mohican River. The collection system was originally a combined sewer system designed to carry both sanitary sewage and stormwater. In the mid-1980s it was converted to a separate sanitary system. This change from combined system to separate sanitary system brought the city under a more stringent regulatory regime.

U.S. EPA regulations are based on the assumption that flows in a separate sanitary system will not have a significant stormwater component and consequently there will be no sanitary sewer overflows (SSO) and no plant bypasses. The Mansfield system has no sanitary sewer overflows. At the WWTP, dry weather flow averages about 9 MGD. It is processed through primary treatment, secondary treatment and disinfection before discharge to the Rocky Fork. During wet weather, intermittent flows of up to 20 MGD are processed in this way. Above that level, some flows are diverted to the 5 million gallon equalization basin (EQ basin) for storage and later treatment. In extremely high flow situations, the EQ basin, which provides better than primary level treatment, overflows. EQ basin overflow combines with treated secondary effluent and the entire flow is disinfected. The total flow meets NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit limits for concentration. We believe that EQ basin effluent alone meets NPDES permit limits for concentration.

Our NPDES permit is about to be renewed by Ohio EPA. It appears that Ohio EPA is seeking requirements in the permit that would require a plant expansion even though we currently meet concentration limits at all flow levels. Given the high quality of our effluent and given the many competing demands for our municipal resources, we do not believe that we should be required to provide any additional treatment unless it is necessary. Our sewer rates average over \$300 per year per hookup. This is a level that U.S. EPA recognizes as sufficient to properly maintain a system. At this point we are not certain what our renewed permit will require. A number of factors will influence our permit renewal and the cost of implementation to our ratepayers.

Currently U.S. EPA is working on two main issues that could affect our permit. The first is the draft sanitary sewer overflow regulation that was signed by former Administrator Browner in the last days of the Clinton Administration but not yet published in the *Federal Register*. It is being re-examined by the Bush Administration before publication for comment.

Among other issues, the preamble to the draft sanitary sewer overflow regulation requested comment on the level of treatment required for flows reaching the WWTP. We intend to comment on this rulemaking when it is published in the *Federal Register*. We believe that meeting NPDES permit limits should be sufficient to comply with the law. We should not be required to provide treatment for the sake of treatment.

The second important issue relates to the development of the U.S. EPA policy on "recombination" of flows. Recombination is the blending of the part of the total flow that is diverted from secondary treatment with those flows that receive secondary treatment. In Mansfield the recombination only occurs during wet weather. In a letter to Senator Frist dated March 7, 2001, U.S. EPA indicated that NPDES permit issuing authorities (in our case, Ohio EPA) have considerable flexibility in addressing the recombination situation. Generally speaking, if the recombined flows meet permit limits based on secondary treatment or more stringent water quality-based effluent limits and the WWTP was designed to operate in this fashion, then this practice may be approved in the permit. However this policy has not yet been finalized. The agency states that it will be developing guidance addressing this issue. We plan to monitor and participate as necessary. We believe that the guidance should also clarify that, in a separate sanitary system, load limits may increase during wet weather. At this point we are somewhat unclear as to Ohio EPA's view on the recombination issue other than that it is willing to consider various alternatives. We will know more in the near future.

If U.S. EPA confirms this interpretation in the recombination guidance, Ohio EPA will be able to act on the Mansfield situation as it deems appropriate. We do not believe that Ohio EPA should be denied the ability to draft flexible permits as a result of the U.S. EPA interpretation.

We ask that you continue to monitor these issues both in the regulatory process and through confirmation hearings for the U.S. EPA assistant administrator for water. If unsupportable determinations are made by U.S. EPA, we would like to discuss with you options that may be available. Last year Congress acted through the appropriations process to require further examination of the TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) rule. Such an approach could be appropriate for these issues. Another approach to overly stringent U.S. EPA requirements would be the expansion of the grant program in the Wet Weather Water Quality Act of 2000 to provide financial support to cities facing high or increasing wastewater treatment costs due to wet weather. Finally, U.S. EPA should aggressively develop and approve more cost-effective wastewater treatment technology.

If rule interpretation continues in its current direction, then the City is on a path with EPA to spend tens of millions of dollars to provide additional treatment for 3 ½ percent of total annual flow to the WWTP in order to eliminate less than ten annual EQ basin overflows, which are currently meeting all NPDES permit requirements.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your interest in these matters and for your efforts on behalf of the cities in Ohio.