

Water treatment a top priority

Let me begin by saying that combined sewer overflows (CSOs) are definitely not a good thing and we must work to address this issue, but CSOs are definitely not the worst of our water quality problems in the city of Winnipeg.

As a whole, CSOs contribute about 0.3 per cent of the phosphorus getting into Lake Winnipeg annually, while the North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC) contributes upwards of three per cent.

While CSOs range from a total volume of six to 12 billion litres a year, about 250 to 500 million litres of which are actual sewage, the concentration of phosphorus in those overflows is often notably lower than that measured in the actual treated discharges released from the NEWPCC.

On average, the NEWPCC releases 195 million litres a day, or 71 billion litres a year, none of which is in compliance with release limits for phosphorus.

They often exceed by two- to fourfold and even up to five times the concentration of phosphorus legislated for release by their licence. This needs to stop! The cost of upgrading the NEWPCC is similar to that of upgrading the sewer system to reduce CSOs, but we will get about 10 times the benefit in nutrient/pollutant reduction by focusing our efforts on upgrading the NEWPCC.

Yes, we must still address the CSOs over time, but not at the expense of further increasing the length of time before upgrades are made to the NEWPCC. This needs to be made a top priority for any future city of Winnipeg government.

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