

Plan gives 3 years to pull out downspouts

Proposal would fine residents who don't disconnect rain gutters

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About 120,000 central Toronto homeowners who have downspouts running directly into the sewer system will have to disconnect them within three years or face fines, under a new proposal from city staff.

And the city will no longer foot the bill for disconnecting downspouts, something it has been doing under the current voluntary program.

The proposal goes to the works committee for consideration on Wednesday.

For owners who don't want to do the job themselves, the cost of disconnection depends on the situation, said Lou Di Gironimo, general manager of Toronto Water.

"In some cases it could be pretty cheap – less than a few hundred dollars to disconnect," he said in an interview. "In other cases it might be more – it could be upward of the \$800 to \$1,000 range."

How can you tell if your house is affected? If an eavestrough downspout runs directly into a pipe in the ground, then it's connected to the sewer.

The city has been trying for years to get homeowners to disconnect their downspouts.

Ideally there should be separate sewer systems – one to capture clean storm runoff, the other to handle water from bathrooms and kitchens that requires treatment. But in older areas of the city, there's only one network.

When it rains, downspouts funnel huge volumes of relatively clean water into the sanitary sewers and then into treatment plants.

In some parts of the city, the system can't handle the flow, causing sewers to back up and flood basements.

Keeping rainwater out of the sewers saves money because pipes and treatment plants don't have to be as big, Di Gironimo said.

The proposal will target older areas of the city, roughly corresponding to the old city of Toronto, York, East York, and a corner of southwest Scarborough. (A pdf map of the affected area is on the [city's website](#).)

The city's voluntary disconnection policy, in place since 1998, costs the city about \$1,300 per property, including inspections. But it hasn't produced results fast enough.

As a test, the city blitzed one area that had severe basement flooding problems with a door-to-door campaign promoting the program. Yet only 60 per cent of homeowners agreed to disconnect.

A staff report says it's just too expensive to pay for disconnecting all remaining households.

Hiring staff to do all the pre- and post-disconnection inspections, and to administer the payments, would cost \$2.6 million a year, the report says. It recommends cutting off applications for free disconnection immediately, though it says households with incomes under \$40,000 should be eligible for financial help.

City staff would be able to exempt property owners if it's physically impossible or unsafe to disconnect.