

Voluntary Maintenance Programs

One other innovative approach being used by the Grand Strand Water & Sewer Authority (GSWSA) in Conway, South Carolina, uses telephone company policy as a guide. Under GSWSA's Sewer Service Line Maintenance Program customers pay a voluntary monthly fee for the utility to maintain the private line. The \$2.50 per month (\$30 per year) fee is only imposed when the customer signs up for the maintenance program. Once the customer signs up for the program, GSWSA assumes responsibility for the following:

- Clear any sewer backups from customer floor level to the main line (for lines in or under the house, GSWSA only clears those lines that can be accessed through a cleanout without crawling under a house or separating pipes in or under the house).
- Repair all sewer system damage from the perimeter of the house to the main sewer line.
- Restore yard, landscape, driveways, and walks damaged during the repair.
- Reimburse homeowner the cost associated with a sewer backup, including clean up and repair of residence and contents if a clog or problem outside the perimeter of the house causes the backup.

The customer remains responsible for the following:

- Payment of the \$2.50 per month maintenance fee.
- Leaks or clogs, or damage to drain lines and appliances inside the house such as leaking or clogged sink drains, toilet wax seal leaks, etc.
- Damage to sewer lines under the house such as crushed lines, separated lines, leaking joints, bellies, or improper grades, improper sized lines, or poor workmanship by the original plumber.
- Costs associated with clean up and repair of damage to residence and contents if associated with a plumbing problem within the perimeter of the house.

GSWSA excludes apartments, condominium units, shopping centers, and office complexes from the program. Commercial buildings with only one building and one residential equivalent user may join the program.

GSWSA uses internal forces for the private line O&M unless a job is too complex. In these cases, GSWSA selects from a rotating list of local plumbers that have entered into agreements to provide services at average call out and per

hour rates. GSWSA collection system operators stay on-site to monitor and supervise the plumbers work.

In addition to responding to customer complaints, GSWSA provides proactive O&M for those customers signing up for the program. The proactive O&M services includes:

- Identifying and eliminating residential sources of infiltration and inflow.
- Routinely installing cleanouts at property lines and at buildings.
- Televising service lines and correcting bellies, roots, and leaks found during the internal inspection process.

GSWSA also utilizes an insurance policy to protect the utility. In practice, the utility's deductible covers virtually all of the damage claims so there is rarely a reimbursement from the insurance company. However, the insurance policy serves to protect the utility from catastrophic damage claims.

The Sewer Service Line Maintenance Program started July 1, 2002. After the first year of operation, approximately 3,500 customers (about 8 percent) signed up. Prior to starting the program, GSWSA responded to 566 customer service requests in 2001. Of those, 330 (58 percent) were GSWSA's responsibility and 236 (42 percent) were the customer's responsibility. GSWSA also noted that, prior to the program, a 2-inch rain would cause roughly 80 high level alarms at the utilities 415 lift stations. By the end of 2003, a similar 2-inch rain would only result in 1 or 2 high level alarms.