

The five-cent solution

Homes in Oakland unlikely to benefit from sewer rate ruling

A compromise between Detroit and suburban attorneys on new sewerage treatment rates for the metropolitan area probably will have little effect on charges paid this year by homeowners in southern Oakland and western Wayne County.

The agreement on changing the rates, set by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Board, was reached Monday before Chief U.S. District Judge John Feikens. DWSB's proposed rates, which were challenged by suburban and industrial users, took effect Jan. 1.

The increased sewage disposal costs will show up on homeowners' quarterly water bills. A separate DWSB water rate increase from 20-40 percent is expected later this year.

THE WHOLESALE rate charged to sewage districts which serve southern Oakland and western Wayne was reduced five cents under the compromise to \$3.40 per 1,000 cubic feet of water (mcf). The rate since last July 1 had been \$2.50 per mcf.

The rate for the Clinton-Oakland Sewage District, which serves northeast Oakland County, including West Bloomfield and Avon townships, was reduced 78 cents to \$4.46 per mcf. For the second half of 1979, the rate was \$4.27 per mcf.

The wholesale rate usually is passed on to residents. The sewage district and local communities may add on transportation and billing costs.

The new rates must be approved by the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners and City Council before they take effect.

OAKLAND COUNTY Drain Commissioner George Kuhn, whose office runs the South Oakland County Sewage Disposal System, said the compromise

rates will still mean an increase of \$1.50 a month — or \$18 a year — for a typical south county homeowner. This includes Southfield, Troy, Farmington, Farmington Hills and the Birmingham-Bloomfield Hills area.

The increase is "possibly in that area," Kuhn said. His district's charge of \$3.60 per mcf for sewage disposal won't be changed due to the compromise.

"We'll evaluate it in another quarter," Kuhn said. "If we feel we're on the high side for charging, we could cut back our rate."

JOHN BREEN, attorney for the Wayne County Board of Public Works, said the rate charged by the Rouge Valley Sewage District as of Jan. 1 will remain at \$3.62 per mcf.

The Rouge Valley system includes Westland, Garden City, Livonia, Plymouth and Redford, Canton and Plymouth townships. Homeowners' bills could increase from \$15 to \$25 annually under the new rates.

Since the wholesale rate decrease was small, Breen said, "We don't anticipate any change in the billing one way or the other — either up or down."

The nickle wholesale rate decrease "really is only six-tenths of a cent" per month saving to a residential user, Breen said.

"At best, it will help to offset inflationary costs," he added.

INDUSTRIAL TREATMENT surcharges were also reduced as part of the compromise. Commercial and industrial business users will pay 17 percent less overall than what DWSB had proposed.

The surcharges, based on pre-set strength levels of three pollutants found in industrial sewage, are re-

quired by federal law and previously have never been charged.

Under DWSB's proposed rates, industry would have provided 10 percent — or \$18.4 million — of the total \$184 million in revenue. The compromise reduces industry's share of the revised \$180.5 million in rate revenues to nearly \$15.3 million.

According to DWSB, suburban and city of Detroit residents will each provide 44 percent of the sewer and water system's revenue during the next 18 months.

MACOMB COUNTY received the biggest rate decrease from \$6.19 per mcf to \$4.82. The rate before Jan. 1 had been \$3.87 per mcf.

The compromise requires Macomb to pay \$12.4 million toward repair of a sewer line break in Fraser in 1978. The revised rate includes 55 cents per mcf to pay for the repair cost, down from \$1.51 per mcf DWSB had originally proposed Macomb residents pay.

The remaining \$2.5 million needed for the sewer line at 15 Mile and Hayes will be paid by the rest of the system.

The agreement with Macomb County, which had wanted the total repair cost spread over the system, was the

most significant aspect of the compromise, according to Kuhn.

"We saved 11 cents (per mcf, which could have been added to south Oakland's rate) by not sharing the overall cost," Kuhn said.

"We've already shared \$2 million to \$3 million of the (sewer line break) initial cost — that's a concession to Macomb County."

Kuhn said permanent repairs to the sewer line could increase the repair bill to \$32 million. Federal and state funding, which would provide 80 percent of the cost, is being sought.

RATES FOR Detroit residents could go slightly up under the compromise. A 23 cents increase from DWSB's proposal to \$4.46 per mcf is expected to be offset by a reduction in the storm water treatment charges. The rate for Detroit residents before Jan. 1 was \$3.23.

The rate for unincorporated suburbs will be reduced 7 cents from the Jan. 1 rate of \$4.23. The rate for the last half of 1979 was \$2.50. The largest of the unincorporated suburbs, whose sewage flows are estimated, is Dearborn.

The new rates represent the fourth increase since mid-1977.

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Program to aid rape victims

A new program for rape victims has begun at the Oakland Crisis Center for Rape and Sexual Abuse in Pontiac.

The "Rape Sensitizing Program" provides crisis intervention counseling to rape victims. It will help the victim with the police, courts and other elements of the criminal justice system.

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy said the program will also develop guidelines for police, law and health agencies to follow when interviewing rape victims.

The program aims to improve police-victim communication, the evi-

dence collection process and investigative procedures.

The \$51,000 first-year cost of the program has been provided through a grant from the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

The service is provided by the county Department of Community and Minority Affairs through a contract with the North Oakland YWCA, which operates the Oakland Crisis Center for Rape and Sexual Abuse at 269 W. Huron Street in Pontiac.

The center's phone number is 322-HELP.



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