

# Sewer began deteriorating even before ground settled

A crumbling sewer line, which earlier this year threatened to interrupt service to nearly 300,000 people in Macomb and Oakland counties, had begun to deteriorate soon after it was constructed due to soil infiltration.

That was one finding of an Army Corps of Engineers study of the near-collapse of the huge sewer interceptor near 15 Mile Road and Schoenherr in Sterling Heights. The corps study was released Tuesday by Federal Judge John Feltner.

The sewer line serves northeastern Oakland County, including Avon Town-

ship and part of West Bloomfield Township.

The damaged pipe was discovered during a routine inspection by the city of Detroit Water and Sewerage Department in late January. A \$7 million temporary bypass line was constructed in March.

THE CORPS study concluded:

- The distress experienced in the tunnel began immediately following construction, as soon as the ground water level was sufficiently high to initiate piping (movement) of soil through open construction and cold joints.
- Cold joints are caused by delays in concrete pouring of sewer pipes, which the corps cited in the study.
- The study found that the soil movement "took place over a significant period of time." The 12-inch diameter pipe, built by Michigan Sewer Construction Co., of Southfield, was completed in the early 1970s.
- As more soil moved into the tunnel, "the distress was manifested by the crack pattern found and by total collapse" of one section of the pipe, according to the corps study. Another section of the pipe was found to be partially collapsed.

DETROIT WATER department director Charles Beckham said he agreed that the pipe problem began shortly after construction. And he said the department was "concerned with the frequency of our inspections."

However, Beckham said, design and construction of the pipe could not be blamed.

"Cold joints are a fact of construction in interceptors when you're pouring concrete," he said.

Oakland and Macomb county officials had said design and construction of the pipe had to be considered part of the problem.

The corps report was distributed to suburban officials Tuesday.

The corps study also found that "concrete composition" and quality "were not factors."

Oakland and Macomb hired a Baltimore consultant firm to study the crumbling interceptor on the suburbs' behalf. Representatives of the firm are expected to question corps engineers in court on Oct. 30.

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