EAST CHICAGO life

YOUR LOCAL SOURCE FOR EAST CHICAGO NEWS AND EVENTS

STEMMING THE TIDE SPECIAL FLOOD REPORT

100-year-old sewer system needs upgrades

Sandwiched between the COVID-19 pandemic and the civil unrest that followed the murder of George Floyd, East Chicago experienced a flood of epic proportions. It wasn't so much the amount of rain: it was the 27 minutes it took to drop 735 million gallons of rainwater on the residents of East Chicago.

Like so many other of life's emergencies, the intensity of this storm came without warning.

What that storm shows in very real terms is the critical need for upgrades to our 100-year-old sewer system. No one was more surprised than myself to learn that more than a decade ago our oldest neighborhoods in the city are still serviced with century old clay pipes.

Over the last decade, my administration has spent $13 million to upgrade the sanitary and stormwater system. It's not enough. We need to spend $100 million to bring the system into compliance with federal regulations. We have crunched the numbers and looked for even more efficiencies.

We need the City Council to approve a three-year plan for modest cost increases for residents and industries to help pay for these very expensive – and very necessary – projects.



I am asking you to contact your representatives on the City Council and ask them to vote "yes." In the meantime, the Sanitary Board has approved spending up to $1,500 to install flood prevention check valves.

I know I am asking a lot, but I wouldn't be asking unless it was absolutely necessary. We can pay now or we can pay in damages to our homes later. We cannot do these projects without your help.

ANTHONY COPELAND
Mayor City of East Chicago

FLOOD DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Homeowners impacted by recent flooding are urged to submit their information to Indiana 211 to help formulate a preliminary damage assessment and initiate the mitigation process.

More than 2,000 Lake County homes were damaged. Collectively, those damages are estimated to be several million dollars.

Visit https://in211.communityos.org/idhs-damage-assessment to report your info.



UTILITIES DIRECTOR ABDERRAHMAN ZEHRAOUI, PH.D.

"We must upgrade the city's aging sewer system and pump-station capacity or homes will continue to flood"

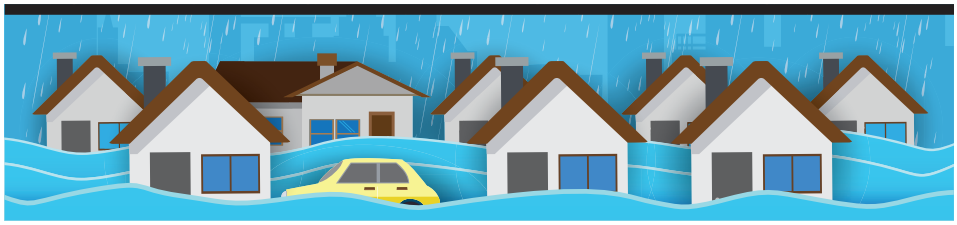
On May 23, an unexpected storm dropped as much as three inches of rain in just 27 minutes — a whopping 735 million gallons of stormwater. Neither our sewer systems nor our neighboring cities' systems were built to handle such a catastrophic event.

The severity of the May 23 rain event was unpredictable. The National Weather Service didn't activate the Flash Flood Warning until 4:53 p.m., just minutes before the storm occurred.

When the storm hit, all 11 pump stations were in use and working normally. All city services were deployed within minutes of the first calls from residents.

Mayor Copeland is focusing on addressing the city's aging infrastructure and has completed $13 million in sewer and storm water improvements over the past decade. Many areas of the city are still served by a 100-year-old combined sewer system, which collects residential sewage with stormwater that flows through outdated, clay sewer lines.

The mayor's Long-Term Control Plan – Phase II was ready to be implemented until it was sidelined earlier this year because of a lack of funding.



LONG-TERM CONTROL PLAN - PHASE II

Phase II of a Long-term Control Plan lacks the $8 million funding necessary for the project. Those funds could have been financed by modestly increasing monthly sewer rates for a typical 5,000-gallon-per-month residential user over a 3-year period – costing an average user $129.72 over three years.

	MONTHLY INCREASE	ANNUAL INCREASE
YEAR 1	$7.81	$93.72
YEAR 2	$1.91	$23.04
YEAR 3	$1.08	$12.96

The upgrades were planned to be financed by a rate increase phased in over three years.

Seventy percent of the cost of the upgrades were planned to be paid for by our East Chicago industries while 30 percent would be paid for by residents. Unfortunately, the rate increase was rejected by the Common Council.

Until these projects are completed, homes will continue to be threatened by flooding of this intensity and frequency because of increasingly adverse weather events.

The mayor is making every effort to find funding and encouraging residents to take advantage of the following opportunities to help reduce their risk of flooding:

- Flood Prevention
- Downspout Disconnection
- Sump Pump Disconnection

See pages 4 and 5 in this issue of East Chicago Life to learn more about these important programs. >>



ROXANA HIT HARD DURING INTENSE STORMS

For Roxana residents, May 23 went from being a normal summer Saturday to having their neighborhood under water in just 10 minutes. Seventeen minutes later, the storm that packed a wallop was over, leaving residents swimming or navigating city streets in small boats.

"Any storm that powerful would have impacted the neighborhood," Utilities Director Abderrahman Zehraoui said. "The situation was made worse when water was diverted from sump pumps and downspouts to alleys where sanitary sewers are located instead of the streets where storm sewers are in place."

"Those decisions made a bad situation worse," Zehraoui said. "If that water would have been diverted to the streets, it might have stayed on the streets a bit longer, but it would not have contributed to basement flooding."

NEXT STEPS

The city is working with residents to move stormwater runoff and sump pump releases to curbside sewers.

Stormwater is considered clean water. As pumps catch up, water is released into nearby waterways.

Stormwater in the sanitary sewers is another matter. It mixes with sewage and overwhelms the system, flooding basements.

IS YOUR HOUSE FLOOD PROOF?

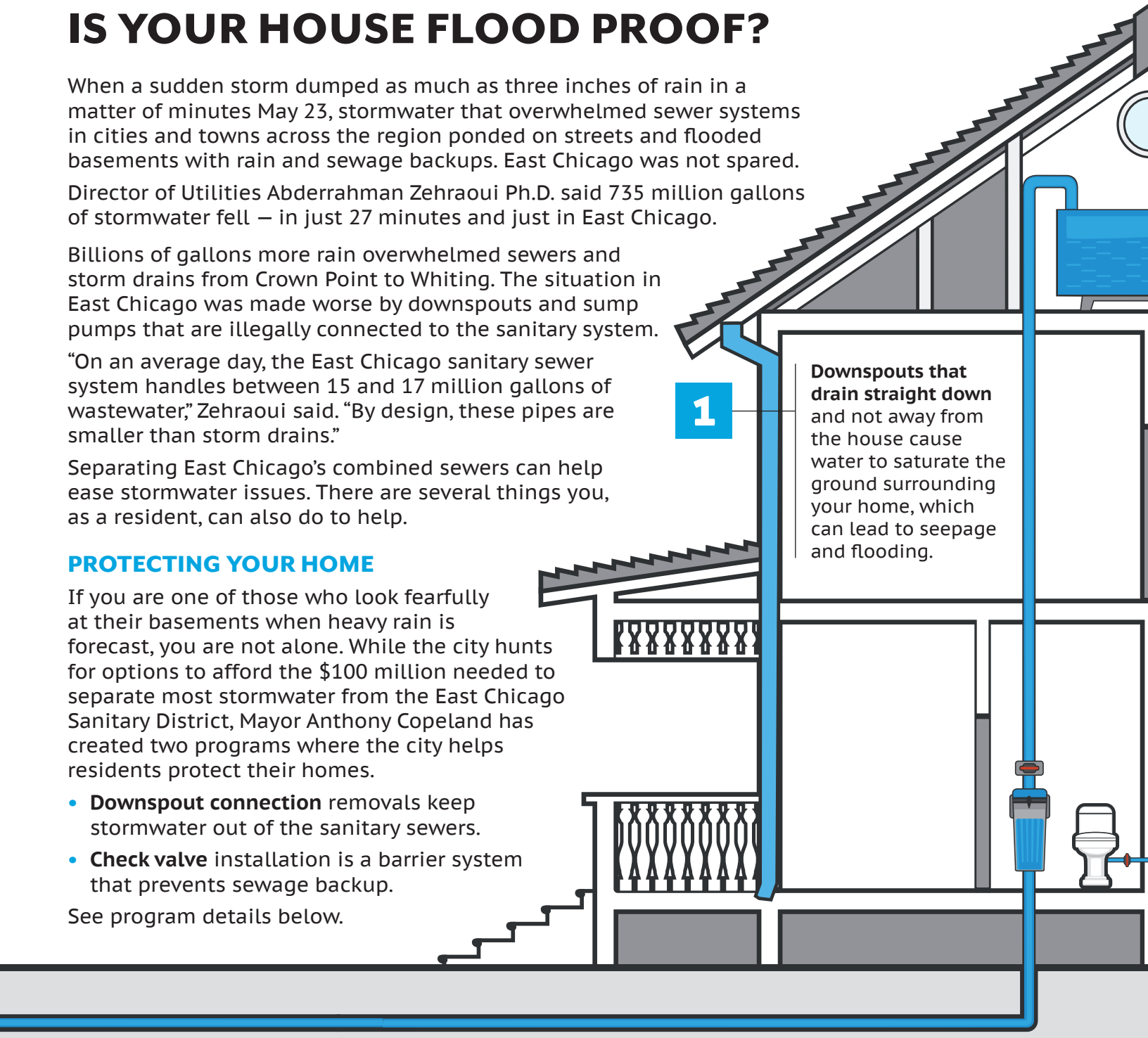
When a sudden storm dumped as much as three inches of rain in a matter of minutes May 23, stormwater that overwhelmed sewer systems in cities and towns across the region ponded on streets and flooded basements with rain and sewage backups. East Chicago was not spared.

Director of Utilities Abderrahman Zehraoui Ph.D. said 735 million gallons of stormwater fell — in just 27 minutes and just in East Chicago.

Billions of gallons more rain overwhelmed sewers and storm drains from Crown Point to Whiting. The situation in East Chicago was made worse by downspouts and sump pumps that are illegally connected to the sanitary system.

"On an average day, the East Chicago sanitary sewer system handles between 15 and 17 million gallons of wastewater," Zehraoui said. "By design, these pipes are smaller than storm drains."

Separating East Chicago's combined sewers can help ease stormwater issues. There are several things you, as a resident, can also do to help.



PROTECTING YOUR HOME

If you are one of those who look fearfully at their basements when heavy rain is forecast, you are not alone. While the city hunts for options to afford the $100 million needed to separate most stormwater from the East Chicago Sanitary District, Mayor Anthony Copeland has created two programs where the city helps residents protect their homes.

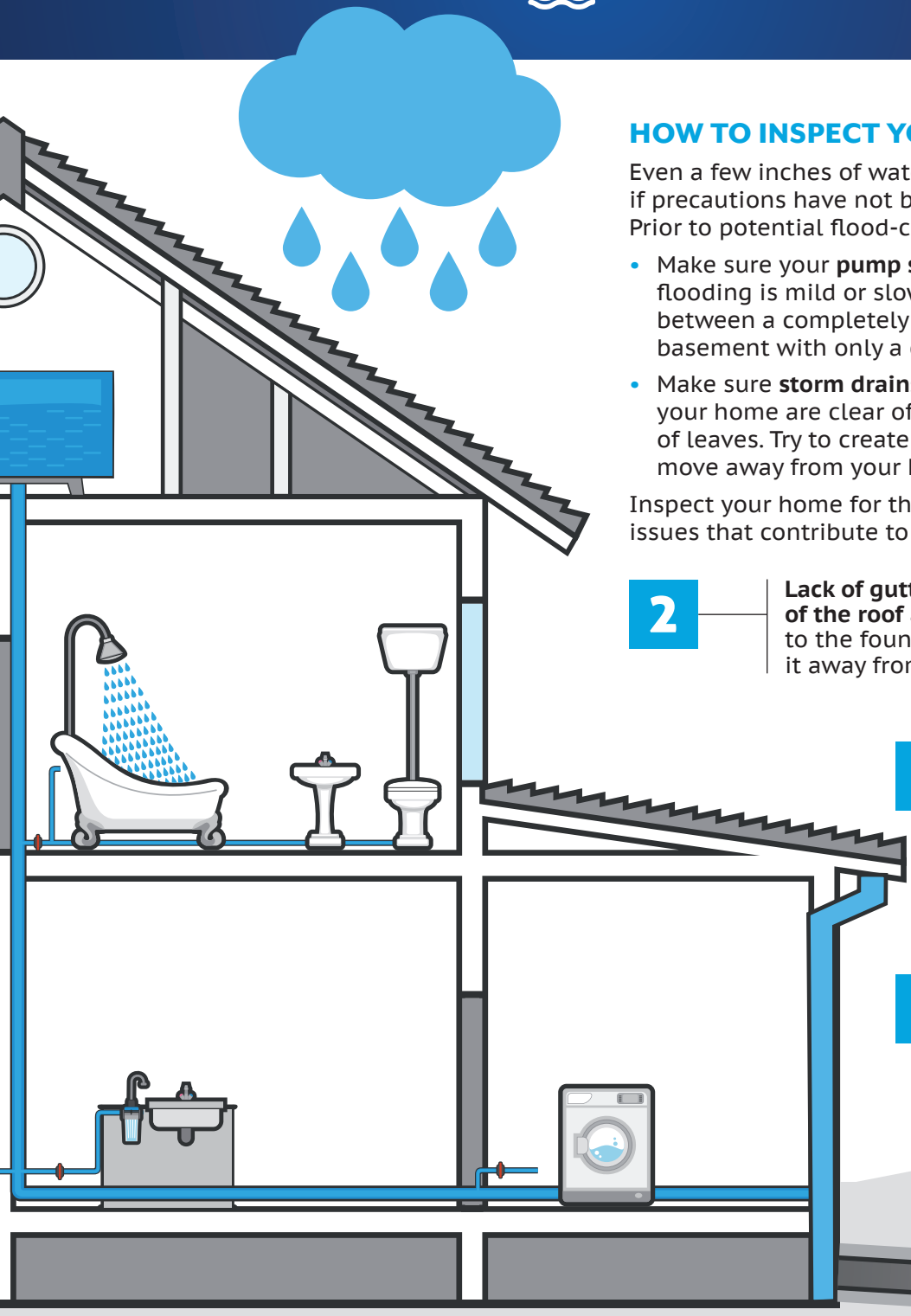
- **Downspout connection** removals keep stormwater out of the sanitary sewers.
- **Check valve** installation is a barrier system that prevents sewage backup.

See program details below.

EAST CHICAGO FLOOD PREVENTION PROGRAM

To prevent sewage from backing up into basements, East Chicago is offering homeowners assistance. The city will reimburse homeowners 75 percent of the cost – up to $1,500 – to have a licensed plumber install a check valve, which only allows water to flow in one direction. The flap on the valve closes when there is a reverse in flow, which prevents water and sewage from flowing back into your home.

INFO: For more information, please call the East Chicago Sanitary District at (219) 391-8466.



HOW TO INSPECT YOUR HOUSE

Even a few inches of water can cause untold damage if precautions have not been taken beforehand. Prior to potential flood-causing weather is predicted:

- Make sure your **pump systems** are working. If the flooding is mild or slow, this could mean the difference between a completely flooded basement and a basement with only a couple of inches of water.
- Make sure **storm drains, gutters** and **downspouts** around your home are clear of debris like yard waste and piles of leaves. Try to create as many easy ways for water to move away from your home as possible.

Inspect your home for these four common roof drainage issues that contribute to basement flooding:

2 **Lack of gutters along the bottom edge of the roof** allows water to drain next to the foundation instead of diverting it away from the house.

3 **Downspouts that drain directly into the sanitary sewer line** can overload the city system, which can cause flooding in your home.

4 **Grading in the yard that directs water to your house** can lead to seepage and flooding.

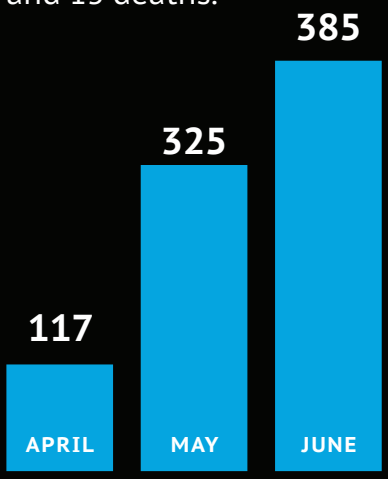
DOWNSPOUT CONNECTION AWARENESS PROGRAM

Did you know downspouts connected directly to the city system is like pouring 10 bathtubs full of extra water into the city system, which can cause flooding in your home? East Chicago started a Downspout Connection Awareness Program in 2014 to assist 1,150 homeowners with illegal downspouts. The city will reimburse homeowners – up to $100 including labor and materials – to have it reconfigured to divert water away from the sanitary sewer system.

INFO: For more information on how the city can help, please call the Sanitary District at (219)391-8466.

EAST CHICAGO COVID-19 CASES

The number of positive Covid-19 cases continue to climb in East Chicago. As of June 10, the health department reported 385 positive cases – more than triple the cases reported the entire month of April – and 13 deaths.



Dramatically increase your chances of avoiding coronavirus by following the rules of social distancing as well as respiratory and hand hygiene. Outside your home – wear a mask, maintain 6 feet distance from others and wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. Get the latest updates at **eastchicago.com**.

CANCELLATIONS

All special events have been canceled or postponed until further notice.

BEACH CLOSED

Jeorse Park Beach, the Splash Pad and H2Oh water sports rentals at the East Chicago Marina remain closed because erosion of the lakefront and the Covid-19 pandemic.

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