



700 West Liberty Street | Louisville, KY 40203-1911
Phone: 502.540.6000 | LouisvilleMSD.org

June 16, 2022

CONTACT:

Sheryl Lauder
Sheryl.Lauder@LouisvilleMSD.org
502.919.0325

MSD Waterway Protection Tunnel now in service

Four-mile tunnel 18 stories underground protecting against sewer overflows during heavy rains

LOUISVILLE, KY – Until recently, a good steady or heavy rain may have resulted in a sewer overflow – where the volume of rainwater exceeds the sewer system capacity, combines with wastewater and overflows into the Ohio River and other area streams. But, now, MSD’s recently completed Waterway Protection Tunnel is operational, ready to store upwards of 55 million gallons of stormwater and wastewater and prevent such overflows.

“The Waterway Protection Tunnel has been MSD’s largest capital improvement project over the past couple of years and will yield tremendous benefits to the community,” said MSD Executive Director Tony Parrott. “While it is well underground and our customers will likely never see it, the tunnel will be at work every day, preventing sewer overflows and protecting Louisville’s health and safety.”

The Waterway Protection Tunnel sits 18 stories underground and stretches four miles from 11th and Rowan streets to Grinstead Drive and Lexington Road. Work on the more than \$221 million project began in 2018. It progressed in phases, from building the drop shafts, pump station and connection points, to excavating 625,000 tons of rock to make way for the 20-foot-wide tunnel and ultimately lining the entire length of the tunnel with 12-inches of solid concrete.

Previously, in a typical rainfall year, an average of 439 million gallons of combined rainwater and wastewater would overflow – polluting area waterways, harming wildlife and plants, and creating the risk of exposing people to harmful bacteria and pathogens. The Waterway Protection Tunnel, along with a series of storage basins MSD completed over the past few years, now captures the vast majority of overflows, storing the combined rainwater and wastewater until the rain subsides and sewer system capacity is available. MSD then pumps the mixture back into the sewer system and conveys it via underground pipes to its water quality treatment centers, where it is treated before release into the river or area waterways.

Waterway Protection Tunnel by the numbers

4 miles long

20 feet diameter

200 feet below the surface

625,000 tons of rock excavated

55 million gallons of storage capacity

10 pumps that each can move 5 million gallons per day

More than 525 local jobs involved in construction

Background

MSD is making significant progress toward its Consent Decree requirements of mitigating sewer overflows that pollute the Ohio River and our streams. Through all of the Consent Decree work to date, including completing the required combined sewer overflow basins and the Waterway Protection Tunnel, overflows to local waterways have reduced from approximately 6.5 billion gallons to less than 500 million gallons in a typical rainfall year. The basins and tunnel hold the contents until system capacity is available for proper treatment and release to the Ohio River.

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About MSD

The Louisville/Jefferson County Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) works to achieve and maintain clean, environmentally safe waterways for a healthy and vibrant community. The organization's more than 670 employees provide wastewater management, drainage and flood protection services across the 376 square miles of Louisville Metro, and wastewater service in portions of Bullitt and Oldham counties. In addition to operating and maintaining Louisville Metro's sewer system, floodwall system, water quality treatment centers and flood pumping stations, MSD invests in hundreds of infrastructure improvement projects each year, plants more than 1,000 trees and other vegetation annually to enhance water filtration and reduce runoff, and provides numerous outreach programs to inform and educate the community about protecting our waterways.