

Chapter 8: Isolating and Fixing Individual Illicit Discharges

Purpose: This program component uses a variety of tools to trace illicit discharge problems back up the pipe to isolate the specific source or improper connection that generates the discharge. This often requires improved local capacity to locate specific discharges, make needed corrections and maintain an enforcement program to ensure repairs.

Method(s): Five basic tools exist to isolate and fix individual discharges, including:

- Pollution reporting hotline
- Drainage area investigations
- Trunk investigations
- On-site discharge investigations
- Correction and enforcement

Desired Product or Outcome(s): Finding and fixing illicit discharges is the core goal of any IDDE program. The process of finding and fixing discharges has several desirable outcomes, such as:

- Improved water quality
- Increased homeowner and business awareness about pollution prevention
- Maintenance of a tracking system to document repairs and identify repeat offenders.

Budget and/or Staff Resources Required:

Budget and staff resources needed to find illicit discharges vary greatly. Some discharge sources will be immediately obvious, while others will require extensive investigations up the pipe until the source can be sufficiently narrowed. Fixing the problem once it is identified is more predictable and can often involve qualified contractors. Costs associated with repairs can also be fully incurred by the offending party or shared, depending on the nature and extent of the illicit discharge.

Integration with Other Programs:

Two important aspects of this program component can be integrated with other NPDES minimum management measures and storm water permitting. First, the pollution hotline can be an important element of any local storm water education initiative. Second, on-site illicit discharge investigations should be closely coordinated with industrial NPDES storm water site inspections.

8.1 Overview of Isolating and Fixing Individual Illicit Discharges

The ultimate goal of every IDDE program is to find and fix illicit discharges, and a range of tools are available to meet this objective. The ensuing chapter discusses each of the tools in more detail. The choice of which tools are used depends on the nature of the local storm drain system, and the type and mode of entry of the discharges.

8.2 Isolating Illicit Discharges

Outfall screening and monitoring are excellent for finding illicit discharge problems, but they often cannot detect most intermittent or transient flows, nor can they always isolate the exact source, particularly when the outfall has a large contributing area and an extensive pipe network. This section provides guidance on four tools to find individual illicit discharges. The first tool is a pollution complaint hotline, which is particularly effective at finding obvious illicit discharges, such as transitory flows from generating sites and sewer overflows. Citizens provide free surveillance around the clock, and their reports should prompt rapid investigations and enforcement. The other three investigative tools involve drainage area, trunk, and on-site investigations.

Pollution Complaint Hotline

A complaint hotline is a dedicated phone number or website where citizens can easily report illicit discharge and pollution concerns. The hotline should always be supported by prompt investigations of each complaint by trained inspectors, usually within 24 hours. Many Phase I communities have utilized hotlines to track down intermittent and transitory discharges, and regard them as one of their most effective tools to isolate illicit discharges (CWP, 2002). Some of the benefits and challenges Phase I communities have encountered in administering an IDDE complaint hotline is summarized in Table 23.

Six basic steps are needed to establish and maintain a successful IDDE complaint hotline, which are outlined in Table 24. More detailed guidance on establishing a hotline is provided in Appendix C, along with a sample illicit discharge incident tracking form.

It is important to keep in mind that a successful hotline requires considerable advertising and outreach to keep the phone number fresh in the public’s mind. Also, program managers should continuously monitor response times, inspection outcomes, and any enforcement taken. All complaints should be entered into the IDDE tracking system so that complaints can be analyzed.

The cost to establish and maintain a hotline varies, but savings can be realized if it can

Table 23: Benefits and Challenges of a Complaint Hotline

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads to early detection and correction of illicit discharges • Encourages active public stewardship • Can “piggyback” on other call response needs • Identifies suspected facilities for further investigation and education • Increases facilities’ and municipalities’ sense of accountability • Increases likelihood of discovering intermittent discharges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and money to provide 24/7 service • Marketing the hotline number • Establishing inter- and intra-departmental process

Table 24: Steps to Creating and Maintaining Successful IDDE Hotline

Steps	Key Elements
1. Define the scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if a hotline is needed • Define the intent of the hotline • Define the extent of the hotline
2. Create a tracking and reporting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design reporting method • Design response method
3. Train personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The basics and importance of IDDE • The complaint hotline reporting, investigation and tracking process • How to provide good customer service • Expected responsibilities of each department/agency
4. Advertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise hotline frequently through flyers, magnets, newspapers, displays, etc. • Publicize success stories
5. Respond to complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide friendly, knowledgeable customer service • Send an investigator to respond to complaints in a timely manner • Submit incident reports to the hotline database system
6. Track incidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify recurring problems and suspected offenders • Measure program success • Comply with annual report requirements

be piggy-backed on an existing community hotline or cost shared with other communities in the region. Also, hotline costs are related to the volume of calls and the staff effort needed for follow-up investigations. A budgeting framework for establish and maintaining a hotline from scratch is provided in Table 25.

Illicit Discharge Investigations

Once an illicit discharge is detected at an outfall or stream, one of four types of illicit discharge investigations is triggered to track down the individual source. These investigations are often time consuming and expensive, require special training and staff

expertise, and may result in legal action. They include:

- Storm drain network investigations
- Drainage area investigations
- On-site investigations
- Septic system investigations

Each type of investigation handles a different type of discharge problem and has its advantages and disadvantages. More detail on these investigations is provided in Chapter 13.

Storm drain network investigations

Storm drain or “trunk” investigations narrow the source of a discharge

Table 25: IDDE Complaint Hotline Costs

Steps	Initial Cost	Annual Costs
Define the scope	\$1,500	\$0
Create a tracking and reporting system	\$2,500	\$2,440
Train personnel	\$2,200	\$1,000
Advertise	\$1,500	\$2,920
Respond to complaints	\$0	\$5,000
Track incidents		
TOTAL	\$7,700	\$11,360

problem to a single segment of a storm sewer. The investigation starts at the outfall, and the field crew must decide how it will explore the upstream pipe network. The three options include:

- Work progressively up the trunk from the outfall and test manholes along the way
- Split the trunk into equal segments and test manholes at strategic points of the storm drain system
- Work progressively down the trunk (i.e., from the headwaters of the storm drain network and move downstream)

The decision to move up, split, or move down the trunk depends on the nature of the drainage system and the surrounding land use. The three options also require different levels of advance preparation. Moving up the trunk can begin immediately when an illicit discharge is detected at an outfall, and only a map of the storm drain system is required. Splitting the trunk requires a little more preparation to examine the storm drain system and find the most strategic manholes to sample. Moving down the trunk requires even more advance preparation, since the most upstream segments of the storm drain network may be poorly understood.

Once crews choose one of these options, they need to select the most appropriate investigative methods to track down the source. Common methods include:

- Visual inspection at manholes
- Sandbagging or damming the trunk
- Dye testing
- Smoke testing
- Video testing

Drainage area investigations

Drainage area investigations are initially conducted in the office, but quickly move into the field. They involve a parcel by parcel analysis of potential generating sites within the drainage area of a problem outfall. They are most appropriate when the drainage area to the outfall is large or complex, and when the flow type in the discharge appears to be specific to a certain type of land use or generating site. These investigations may include the following techniques:

- Land use investigations
- SIC code review (see Appendix A)
- Permit review
- As-built review
- Aerial photography analysis
- Infrared aerial photography analysis
- Property ownership certification

On-site investigations

Once the illicit discharge has been isolated to a specific section of storm drain, an on-site investigation can be performed to find the specific source of the discharge. In some situations, such as subwatersheds dominated by industrial land uses or many generating sites, on-site investigations may be immediately pursued.

On-site investigations are typically performed by dye testing the plumbing systems of households and buildings. Where septic systems are prevalent, inspections of tanks and drain fields may be needed.

On-site investigations are excellent opportunities to combine IDDE efforts with industrial site inspections that target review and verification of proper Storm Water

Pollution Prevention Plans. Appendix A provides a list of industrial activities that typically require industrial NPDES discharge permits.

Septic system investigations

Communities with areas of on-site sewage disposal systems (i.e., septic systems) need to consider alternative investigatory methods to track illicit discharges that enter streams as indirect discharges, through surface breakouts of septic fields, or through straight pipe discharges from bypassed septic systems. Techniques can involve on-site investigations or imagery analysis (e.g., infrared aeriels).

8.3 Fixing Illicit Discharges

Once the source of an illicit discharge has been identified, steps should be taken to fix or eliminate the discharge. Four questions should be answered for each individual illicit discharge to determine how to proceed; the answers will usually vary depending on the source of the discharge.

- Who is responsible?
- What methods will be used to repair?
- How long will the repair take?
- How will removal be confirmed?

Financial responsibility for source removal will typically fall on property owners, MS4 operators, or a combination of the two. Methods for removing illicit discharges usually involve a combination of education and enforcement. A process for addressing illicit discharges that focuses on identifying the responsible party and enforcement procedures is presented in Figure 13, while Table 26 presents various options for removing illicit discharges from various sources. Additional information on common removal actions and associated costs can be found in Chapter 14.

Program managers should use judgment in exercising the right mix of compliance assistance and enforcement. The authority and responsibility for correction and enforcement should be clearly defined in the local IDDE ordinance developed earlier in the program. An escalating enforcement approach is often warranted and is usually a reasonable process to follow. Voluntary compliance should be used for first-time, minor offenders. Often, property owners are not even aware of a problem, and are willing to fix it when educated. More serious violations or continued non-compliance may warrant a more aggressive, enforcement-oriented approach.

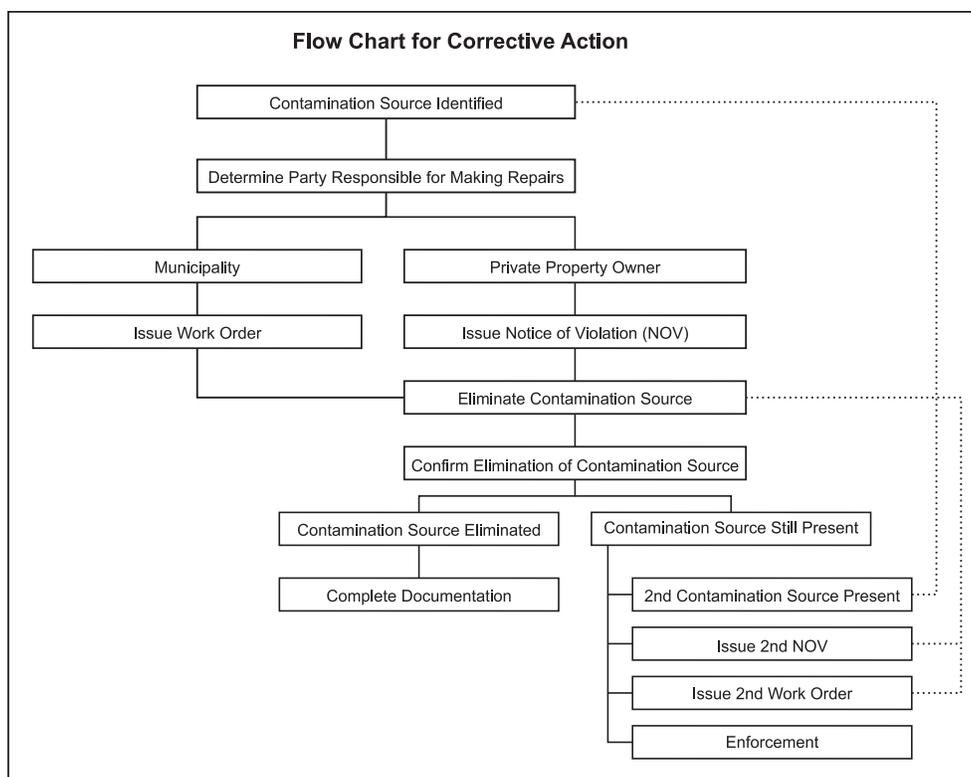


Figure 13: Process for Removing or Correcting an Illicit Discharge

Table 26: Methods to Fix Illicit Discharges		
Type of Discharge	Source	Removal Action(s)
Sewage	Break in right-of-way	Repair by municipality
	Commercial or industrial direct connection	Enforcement
	Residential direct connection	Enforcement; Incentive or aid
	Infrequent discharge (e.g., RV dumping)	Enforcement; Spill response
	Straight pipes/septic	Enforcement; Incentive or aid
Wash water	Commercial or industrial direct connection	Enforcement; Incentive or aid
	Residential direct connection	Enforcement; Incentive or aid
	Power wash/car wash (commercial)	Enforcement
	Commercial wash down	Enforcement
	Residential car wash or household maintenance-related activities	Education
Liquid wastes	Professional oil change/car maintenance	Enforcement; Spill response
	Heating oil/solvent dumping	Enforcement; Spill response
	Homeowner oil change and other liquid waste disposal (e.g., paint)	Warning; Education; Fines
	Spill (trucking)	Spill response
	Other industrial wastes	Enforcement; Spill response