



BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

CITY OF HANNIBAL

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ELECTRIC, WATER AND SEWER DEPARTMENTS

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May 22, 2013

HOW CLEAN IS CLEAN ENOUGH?

Since the Clean Water Act was passed by Congress in 1974, Hannibal Board of Public Works has been responsible for the treatment of Hannibal's sewage before discharging it into the Mississippi River. Even since the 1940's Hannibal has been voluntarily treating its sewage. That is part of being good citizens, doing what we can to keep the water clean for those downstream.

With the passage of the Clean Water Act, Hannibal Board of Public Works changed from a voluntary good neighbor to an obedient servant of the Federal Government. Compliance with the new law is not voluntary. Standards have been set and they must be met.

In 1980, to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act, HBPW built a new Wastewater Treatment Plant. This was not difficult. The Federal Government through the Environmental Protection Agency knew they set a high standard compared to those of the past. To compensate they sent money to Hannibal through the Mo Dept. of Natural Resources to build the new plant. In fact it was built with 90% federal dollars and only 10% local contribution. This "new" plant is still very able today to remove solids and most bacteria, and other objectionable chemicals that our customers flush into the sewer. However, as science is more able to detect pollutants in ever decreasing concentrations, local governments throughout the country are mandated to remove those pollutants with ever-increasing effectiveness. And, the costs for all the cities and counties to meet these mandates are skyrocketing.

Since 1980 the financial position of the Federal Government has changed dramatically and they are no longer offering to fund projects to clean our water any further. That means 100% of the cost of plant improvements will be on the HBPW and the ratepayers of Hannibal. The original Clean Water Act was written in such a way as to require ever cleaner plant discharge as technology improves our ability to detect pollutants. In fact the EPA is frequently taken to court by environmental groups who are constantly pushing for improved treatment of wastewater. And, the environmental groups win because the language of the original law is pretty clear. The Law says the water must be as clean as we can make it.

Some are beginning to ask "How clean is clean enough?" As a country we are divided on this issue. Many believe we are not there yet. Others think we have gone farther than necessary. The Law stands and it requires ever-increasing cleanliness from wastewater treatment plants. In August, Hannibal voters will be asked to vote on two questions. The questions are not about compliance, but only about how we choose to pay for that compliance. Stay tuned to this space as we try to define what this 40 year old law means for us in the days ahead.

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Sincerely,

Robert W Stevenson

Robert W. Stevenson, P.E.
General Manager

“The mission of the Hannibal Board of Public Works is to provide safe, reliable utility products with excellent customer service at reasonable prices.”