



## STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

### Implications of Creating a Dedicated Basement Flooding Telephone Call Line

<b>Date:</b>	September 24, 2008
<b>To:</b>	City Council
<b>From:</b>	Toronto Water
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2008\Cluster B\TW\cc08015

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to provide information on telephone lines available for residents who have experienced basement flooding and to document the implications of creating a separate dedicated telephone call line for residents who have experienced chronic basement flooding.

#### Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

#### DECISION HISTORY

At Executive Committee on September 2, 2008, the General Manager, Toronto Water, was requested to report directly to City Council on September 24, 2008, on providing an additional emergency phone number for residents who have experienced basement flooding one or more times.

#### ISSUE BACKGROUND

Toronto Water has two phone lines for residents to call regarding basement flooding. The first is an emergency number, 416-338-8888, which is operated by the Policy, Planning, Finance and Administration (PPF&A) Division, 24 hours per day, seven days per week and is a shared service with other operating Divisions within Cluster B. Residents can contact City staff and report water or sewage related incidents including basement flooding. Staff answering calls follow protocols to screen and prioritize all emergency response activities. Call agents can dispatch staff to residents' homes to attend to various situations including providing assistance in determining the cause(s) of a basement flooding incident.

The second phone line is to assist homeowners reduce the potential for basement flooding. Toronto Water has a Basement Flooding Protection Subsidy Program and contact line (416-395-6376) where residents can receive eligibility and application requirements for the program. The program averages approximately 3,500 calls annually. This number is not intended to be used for emergency basement flooding calls as staff are only available to answer calls during business hours.

From a Corporate perspective, the City is implementing the 311 initiative and is set to re-align the way customers contact and engage the City for services. Phase One of the 311 roll out includes Toronto Water and is on schedule to be implemented by the end of the first quarter 2009. As part of the 311 re-alignment, Toronto Water will be creating a new dedicated customer dispatch unit within the Division to better manage the water and sewer customer calls received from the Corporate 311 Call Centre and requiring a response from Toronto Water work crews.

## **COMMENTS**

There are a number of staffing and financial implications associated with creating a dedicated Basement Flooding telephone call line. Additional resources are required to hire staff, launch and promote a new basement flooding telephone call line outlined as follows:

### **Staffing**

Incidents of isolated basement flooding occur at all times of the day. Presently, the PPF&A call centre (416-338-8888) answers emergency water and sewer calls on a 24 hour basis, seven day per week. The emergency number is widely advertised and the centralized service provides a larger pool of staff to respond to various situations that can occur throughout the day. The pooled staff can respond to a rapid increase in caller volume for any type of emergency more effectively than if telephone lines were separate and dedicated to individual types of emergencies.

A new and separate telephone line for basement flooding emergencies would require additional staffing on a 24 hour basis and the financial implications of implementing such a service needs further analysis.

### **Public Relations**

The emergency phone line is widely advertised and can be found on all Toronto Water brochures including the City's Water Bill. It is also found on the City of Toronto web site. Access Toronto refers residents to this number and contractors and plumbers are also aware of the phone line. Creating a new telephone line, on a temporary or permanent basis, will result in additional expenditure to promote the existence of the line and cause unnecessary confusion for residents who may become unsure of which number to call for their various service needs.

### **Software Licenses and Property Information**

The PPF&A Call Centre has proprietary software licenses to allow staff to link a call with the Toronto Water work management system to create a Customer Service Request. As the work management system is based on the municipal property address system, Call Implications of Creating a Dedicated Basement Flooding Telephone Call Line

Centre staff can quickly review previous issues/items associated with the property and determine a better course of emergency action.

Additional software licenses and computers will need to be purchased and integrated into existing systems to allow access to historical customer service data.

### **Crew response**

Customer Call agents are trained to screen and prioritize emergency crew response based on a pre-determined list of factors and in consideration of the particular events that may be taking place at that time. Depending on the circumstances, crews are dispatched on a priority basis and, due to the nature of the emergency or the volume of calls received during a storm event, may not arrive at a resident's home for several hours or even days after the customer call. During severe weather, the Customer Call Centre may receive hundreds of service requests and the City is unable to provide a guarantee on response time in those situations.

City staff are authorized to respond to basement flooding service calls to assess the cause of flooding and take immediate action if there are problems found with the City's sanitary or storm sewer systems. In many instances, staff are unable to provide further service to residents as the basement flooding problem relates to a private property matter and staff have no authority to maintain or repair private plumbing systems.

Creating an additional telephone line, on a temporary or permanent basis, for residents who have previously experienced basement flooding issues will require additional resources not currently in the operating budgets of either the Toronto Water Division or the PPF&A Division. The present emergency response system requires staff to screen and prioritize incoming calls and dispatch crews to the most pressing emergency situation occurring at that time. There is no present policy to prioritize or differentiate basement flooding service calls from all other emergency service calls received by the City.

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## **SIGNATURE**

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