



## Orange Water and Sewer Authority

*A public, non-profit agency providing water, sewer and reclaimed water services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community.*

**NEWS RELEASE April 16, 2010**

### OWASA resumes annual mowing and clearing of sewer easements

In the week of April 19<sup>th</sup>, OWASA will resume the annual mowing, clearing and inspection of its sanitary sewer easements. The easement clearing work, which includes trimming trees and shrubs where needed, is intended to:

- ◆ prevent roots from entering cracks and joints in sewers. When roots grow into a sewer, they can block the flow of wastewater and cause it to overflow from a manhole. Preventing and minimizing wastewater overflows is one of OWASA's highest priorities.
- ◆ ensure safe access for inspections, maintenance and repair work, including emergency responses to wastewater overflows when needed.

Most of OWASA's easements are 30 feet wide, but usually about 20 feet of the easement width is cleared (about 10 feet on each side of a sewer main).

The clearing work will begin west of Carrboro, and will progress through Carrboro and Chapel Hill in coming months. OWASA plans to mow all of its sewer easements at least once in 2010.

Any customer with questions or comments about the easement clearing work is invited to contact Thurman Green, OWASA's Manager of the Collection and Distribution Systems, at 537-4224 or [tgreen@owasa.org](mailto:tgreen@owasa.org).

A brochure with more detailed information about sewer easements will be mailed on request to any customer and is available on the OWASA Website at <http://www.owasa.org/home/FAQView.aspx?IDX=16>.

In particular, customers are encouraged to contact OWASA if they have trees, shrubs, fencing, structures, etc. that may need to be relocated from an easement.

Some plantings, such as shallow-rooted trees and shrubs, are normally allowed in the outer part of an easement with OWASA's approval of a planting plan.

### **Background information**

#### What is an OWASA easement?

An OWASA easement is a defined area, normally across private property, in which OWASA has the right to:

- ◆ keep clear access.

- ◆ do maintenance, repairs, inspections, improvements and renovations.
- ◆ install water or sewer pipes, manholes and related items.

The presence of an easement does not change the ownership of the underlying land, but the owner's use of an easement area is limited by OWASA's right to do clearing and other work as noted above.

#### Does OWASA own or maintain drainage or stormwater easements?

No. We have easements for our drinking water and sanitary sewer (wastewater) facilities. However, in some locations, an easement may have been created for multiple utility purposes, which may include stormwater, energy and/or communications as well as OWASA services.

#### How wide is a sewer easement?

OWASA's sewer easements are normally 30 feet wide. In many but not all cases, an easement goes along the rear or side boundary of two properties so that each of the adjacent lots includes an easement area 15 feet wide. Sewer pipes and manholes are usually in the approximate center of an easement.

#### Where are most sewers and easements located?

Many public sewers are installed in easements outside of street right-of-way. Because most sewers operate with the natural force of gravity, they have a downhill slope and are therefore often installed in low areas such as ravines and along creeks.

The location of an easement is normally recorded in the County Registry of Deeds with a surveyor's document that shows the boundary of the easement. Property owners are encouraged to check their land acquisition records to see whether and where their property may include utility easements.

Citizens are invited to contact the OWASA Engineering and Planning Department at 537-4214 to check whether there is an OWASA sewer on the citizen's land. The presence of an OWASA sewer is also indicated by manholes with covers marked "sanitary sewer" or "OWASA."

Most public water lines are in street right-of-way rather than in easements across private property. However, some water mains are in off-street easements, which OWASA also keeps clear.

#### **For more information:**

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