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Local spotlight

Sewer pipe cameras on lookout for defects

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ST. CLAIR SHORES – It's reality TV time in St. Clair Shores, as television cameras rolled into the city on Monday.

But this show isn't about starlets or apprentices, and it won't exactly draw big ratings. Instead, the cameras will go below the city's surface to hunt for leaking, damaged or blocked sanitary sewer lines.

"We don't have X-ray glasses. These (pipes) are 50, 60 and 70 years old," said Curt Dumas, the department of public works and water director. "We have no idea what's down there. But now we know."

The three-month project to probe into 14 miles of the city's concrete sewer lines – using bread loaf-size cameras – began this week. The goal is to find minor problems, such as leaks or tree roots, to repair before they become major issues.

Although the \$197,000 project is costly, Dumas said, the city will

save money because the repaired lines keep out ground water and prevent basement flooding and sink holes.

"It saved us so much money in sewer back-ups," Dumas said. "We've found so many time bombs that were waiting to go off."

Workers with the Brownstown Township-based Inland Waters Pollution Control, Inc. began the project early Monday in the city's north end on Robeson. The process includes using a jet truck to push pressurized water through the sewer line and vacuum out the debris, said Curt Maring, project manager.

Then, a pan-and-tilt camera – which is on a transporter with wheels – is dropped through the manholes and drives along the sewer pipe. The camera head can rotate 360 degrees to see all angles of the pipe. The camera is controlled by a worker and the pipe's interior is



Rene Gendron operates a camera and computer to look at digital photos of underground sewer lines. A three-month project uses cameras to check St. Clair Shores sewer lines for leaking, damaged or blocked pipes.



Mark LeBeau, left, and Chris McCoy pump out a sewer before a camera is put under the ground to check for problems with the pipes.

viewed inside a work vehicle on a monitor.

The camera views the water flow and can spot defects in the pipe, its joints and the connections to residents' homes. City officials are notified as problems are found, Maring said.

It's the type of preventative maintenance that should be a priority for municipalities, he said.

For example, Maring said, if the camera catches water infiltrating into the sewer pipe, that could mean sewer water is leaking into the storm sewer. Also, if a tree root is found by the camera, the worker will send a tool down the manhole to cut the

root, which is the No. 1 cause of sewer problems.

"Usually in every sewer line we find a defect," he said.

St. Clair Shores has participated in the TV-monitoring program since the late 1990s.

It's one of the last jobs under the massive \$81 million Lake St. Clair Clean Water Initiative aimed at making the lake cleaner and preventing basement flooding, said Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Anthony V. Marrocco.