2010 Flood Yielded New Water Plant For Tenn. City

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Severe flooding last year that washed away the city of Clarksville's wastewater treatment plant's ability to operate has also hastened a needed reconstruction of the facility.

With repairs to the plant and needed new construction, the city will essentially build a new facility, said Pat Hickey, the head of Clarksville Gas and Water.

Hickey said the city would have had to build a new sewage treatment plant within a decade, had it not been for the flood damage a year ago.

Asked if the city would ultimately benefit financially because of the flooding, Hickey replied, "In the grand scheme of things? Yes. Would I have planned to do it this way? No."

Utility division officials expect the federal government to reimburse the city for 70 percent of the cost of repairing and improving the damaged plant. Most of what's been spent so far was for emergency purchases, but most of the remaining cost will be to improvements, such as new administration and electrical buildings, a redesigned secondary clarifier system and a new headworks facility, which is the first stage in treating incoming wastewater.

Officials estimate replacing or supplementing the aging plant would have cost between $50 million and $100 million sometime in the next 10 years.

Torrential rain that fell in Middle Tennessee on May 1-2, 2010, caused widespread flooding that caused the loss of the plant administration building and ruined the electrical hub at the plant. Much of the equipment Clarksville immediately needed in the wake of the flood was hard to find because other cities faced similar crisis.

Limited sewage treatment resumed May 12.

A year later, the plant can handle an average day's sewage flow and meets state and federal treatment standard on most days. But it is still not operating at full capacity, Hickey said.

Operating the plant takes more labor in its current state because quality control testing must be done manually. Although operation of the plant has settled into a routine, it isn't a permanent fix.

The next step is construction of a new electrical building, which should be finished in early 2012, Hickey said.

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