



Response to Questions on the 2016 LOBs

Request By: Supervisor Gross

Relevant LOB(s): N/A

Question: Provide an update on the lateral pipe issue.

Response:

Some homes and businesses built in Fairfax County through the 1970s may have been built using Orangeburg lateral sewer pipes. The Orangeburg lateral pipe, unlike other types, was made from layers of wood pulp and pitch pressed together. It is one of many types of pipes used during construction in the United States from about 1860 to 1970. Originally, the Orangeburg lateral pipe was used as a conduit for electrical wiring and some other applications. Orangeburg lateral pipes have since been removed from the list of acceptable materials by the majority of building codes. Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) pipes became popular in the 1980s and are in common use today.

Under ideal conditions Orangeburg pipes may have a life span of approximately 50 years. Orangeburg pipes may blister, peel in layers, and eventually collapse. It is not uncommon to have to replace the entire sewer lateral, which is a privately-owned pipe that connects the property's wastewater plumbing to the County's publically-owned sewer line, if an Orangeburg lateral pipe was used. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes are more durable and may have a life span of more than 100 years.

There was a period of time when the failure of the Orangeburg lateral pipes was in the news. There were many Fairfax County residents experiencing failure of their sewer laterals and many of the failures were attributed to this type of material. However, based on plumbing permit records, the replacement of Orangeburg lateral pipes has drastically decreased over the years. Wastewater staff still observes an occasional replacement, but not as regularly as in the past. Staff speculates that the vast majority of lateral pipes have already been replaced. The popular installation timeframe for Orangeburg pipes was in the 1950-1960s; therefore, most lateral pipes have exceeded their life expectancy and have most likely been replaced.