

# ‘There was a geyser in my shower’: Rainstorm floods lower-city streets and basements

By Matthew Van Dongen  
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A brief-but-mighty rainstorm flooded streets and basements in the west end Tuesday night, spurred sewer overflows and washed out part of the Chedoke Radial Trail.

It's unclear exactly how much rain fell in west Hamilton between 6 and 7:30 p.m. — barely six millimetres registered at the airport all day and 19 mm fell at the Royal Botanical Gardens, for example. But it was enough to push sewage-laced storm water into at least 27 homes, mostly around Westdale.

The intense rain hit amid online reports of a “rotating wall cloud” visible from Ancaster, but Environment Canada said Wednesday the closest area under investigation for a possible tornado is Wellington County.

Lyla Miklos ended up with a swirling sewage storm in her bathroom, though.

“There was a geyser in my shower. Also, the toilet,” said the Strathcona neighbourhood resident, who spent Wednesday cleaning a flooded basement and calling her insurance company.



Miklos said an “intense” downpour around 7 p.m. pushed stormwater into her rented home through the sewers, spreading several inches of muddy water throughout the finished basement within 20 minutes.

“It was very exciting,” she said wryly, recalling a frantic scramble to unplug computers and other electronics before the water rose to dangerous levels.

Ward 1 Coun. Maureen Wilson posted video of Aberdeen Avenue awash in flood water around 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.

“It was like a lake,” said Wilson, who added some cars started turning around rather than braving a rapidly growing pond underneath the Aberdeen overpass near Studholme Road.

“It was just an enormous amount of water in a very short period of time.”

Wilson expressed concern that many homeowners told her they had already installed backflow valves meant to prevent overflow sewage and stormwater from ending up in their basements.

She urged residents affected by sewer backups to contact the city at 905-546-2489 so the “geographical scope” of the problem can be mapped and studied by staff.

Wilson also said she is asking whether flooded residents are eligible for financial aid.

Council has in the past voted to offer compassionate grants to homeowners with sodden basements after extreme flooding, but it's not yet clear if Tuesday's downpour qualifies for the disaster relief program.

Regardless, Wilson argued the outsized impact of the brief deluge is yet another reason for the city to consider dedicated stormwater fees — what critics label a “rain tax” — to help cover the cost of storm-protection projects.

“I think it's a harbinger of things to come, of those greater extremes expected as a result of climate change,” she said.

Most residential wet basement reports came from the west end, but flood calls to the fire department also came from downtown and Upper James Tuesday evening.

The downpour also triggered combined sewer overflows into Chedoke Creek, the harbour and Red Hill Creek, according to the city's tracking website. The city's main treatment plant at Woodward Avenue was also briefly forced to “bypass” untreated sewage into the harbour at the height of the storm.

The parks department closed a section of the popular Chedoke Radial Trail Wednesday morning after a “washout” caused by stormwater roaring over the side of the escarpment, said parks head Kara Bunn.



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