

## DESIGN, MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF PLANTS FOR TREATMENT OF SEWAGE.

At the recent convention of the American Public Health Association, held in Jacksonville, Fla., the question of sewage treatment received worthy consideration in the valuable progress reports presented by several committees of the association. One meriting careful perusal had to do with the design and operation of treatment works, and was submitted by the committee on sewerage and sewage disposal, consisting of Messrs. Geo. S. Webster, chairman; Frank A. Barbour, Geo. A. Johnson, Langdon Pearse, and F. Herbert Snow. A portion of the report is as follows:—

All disposal works should be recognized as machines which require intelligent supervision and which, if properly designed and maintained, can be made to produce just that quality of effluent which the diluting capacity of the local stream will render satisfactory. In this way greater general progress in the betterment of stream conditions will result.

It will frequently happen that, in small streams, the dry-weather flow can, with profit, be increased by the intelligent use of stored upstream water, and the discharge of a partly treated sewage thus made possible at all seasons.

Where the two-story type of tank is adopted care must be exercised that the tanks are not made too large, as under such circumstances they are liable to fail of their purpose by reason of the sewage in the settling chamber becoming septicized and creating nuisance.

**Patented Processes.**—Town authorities should not deal with the proprietors of any patented processes or devices for sewage treatment without the assistance of some competent advising engineer.

The treatment of sewage has always seemed to be a particularly fertile ground for the exploitation of patented methods, from the early days of the many processes of chemical precipitation to the present-day electrolytic treatment; many of these schemes, while apparently successful in the experimental plants, are entirely infeasible on a practical scale. There is danger in deducing results from small test apparatus without scientific study by a qualified expert; often the cost of such treatments, when undertaken practically, is prohibitive. The proprietor of a process who is looking for a contract will give a bond and make various propositions which appeal to the people of a town and in this manner lead them to favor the acceptance of such propositions. Many costly mistakes have been foisted on communities in this way.

**Processes of Treatment.**—Sedimentation and Sludge Digestion.—Usually the first process of treatment is the removal of the solid matters which have been maintained in suspension by the velocity of flow in the sewer. In the past, when the solids were allowed to settle in tanks in which the sewage flowed over and in contact with the putrescent deposits in the bottom, odors resulted. Also, when the deposit from such tanks, called sludge, was placed upon the ground or upon drying beds, the foul emanations added to the nuisance. But within recent years, two-story tanks have been devised and are in successful operation whereby the sewage is settled for a short period of time in the upper story and the sludge allowed to remain in the lower compartment of the tank sufficiently long for the decomposable matters to digest, and the settling sewage is kept from coming in direct contact with the digesting sludge.

Such tanks will discharge an effluent practically free of settleable matter in nearly as fresh a condition as when received. The gases evolved during digestion of the sludge away from contact with the sewage are principally methane or marsh gas and carbon dioxide, both of which are inodorous. Sludge withdrawn from such tanks after digestion is inoffensive, dries quickly and may be used for filling low land or for agricultural purposes with no danger of nuisance.

**Oxidation.**—If the conditions require more refined treatment than sedimentation, it becomes necessary to adopt processes for oxidation. This may be accomplished by means of intermittent sand filters, contact beds or sprinkling filters, the choice of which is largely dependent on the availability of different construction materials and the size of plant to be installed. Intermittent sand filters are only economical where large areas of sandy soil are available. The sprinkling filter, on the score of economy and on account of the maximum efficiency secured on a minimum area of land, is generally given preference; yet under certain conditions contact beds are justified.

The present-day tendency is to adopt processes which will maintain, as far as possible, aerobic conditions in the liquid at all stages through the plant; the maintenance of such aerobic conditions is the primary consideration in avoiding nuisance.

**Disinfection.**—As the purpose of disinfection is the destruction of pathogenic bacteria, in order to provide a double safeguard against water-borne diseases, it can be generally said that disinfection of sewage is an unnecessary refinement, unless the effluent of the sewage-treatment works is discharged into a water course adjacent to and above the intake of a water-purification plant, and even in such a case the responsibility of protecting the public health should rest upon the purification of the water.

It is not practical to disinfect crude sewage containing particles of organic matter of appreciable size, as with the usual period of contact it is impossible for the disinfectant to penetrate the solids.

**Odors and Their Avoidance.**—The amount of odors depends largely on the freshness of the sewage and the method of treating and handling the sludge. The freshness of the sewage depends largely on time of travel and the design of the collecting system, on the adaptation of size to discharge, the provision for self-cleansing velocities and on the ventilation of the sewers so as to provide as much natural aeration to the liquid as possible. If the sewage is fresh or if, in other words, it contains dissolved oxygen, there will not be serious odors from the application or treatment of the liquid portion, provided the plant is maintained with no lodgment of sewage in pools or overloading of the surface of the filters.

There is a potential cause of odors in the sludge. But by the use of the more modern type of tanks, with thorough digestion of the decomposing solids and discharges on properly prepared sludge-drying beds, under favorable weather conditions, no odor of serious moment, noticeable more than a few hundred feet, should ever occur. Odors can be largely eliminated by good design, but their occurrence depends more particularly on proper supervision of the plant.

By the use of the two-story sedimentation tanks, which provide for the digestion of sludge, and by care in the management of the works, plants are operated in Europe and in this country where no odors are noticeable either from the sewage or from the sludge during drying.