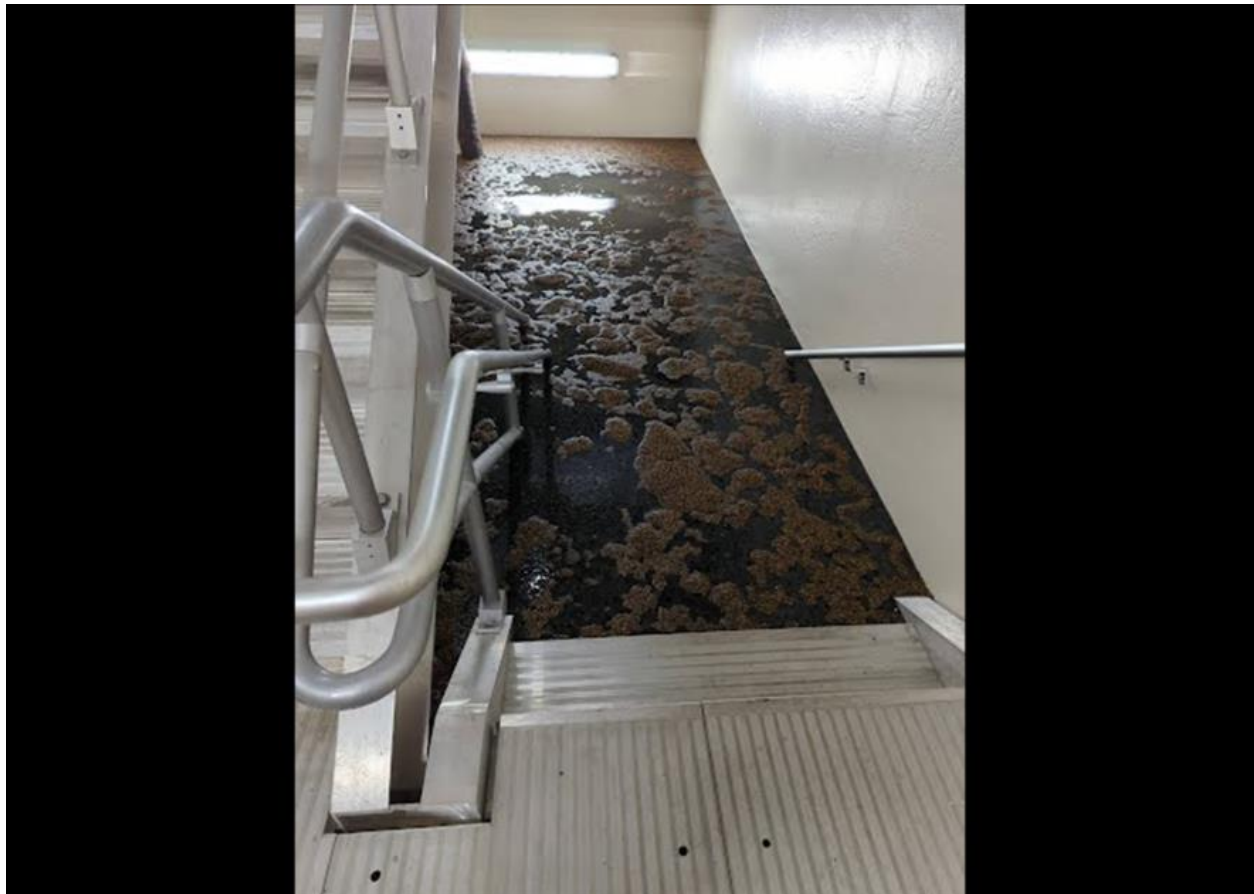


Binghamton-Johnson City sewage treatment plant flooded following incident

By [Vaughn Golden](#)

Published February 18, 2022 at 6:25 AM EST

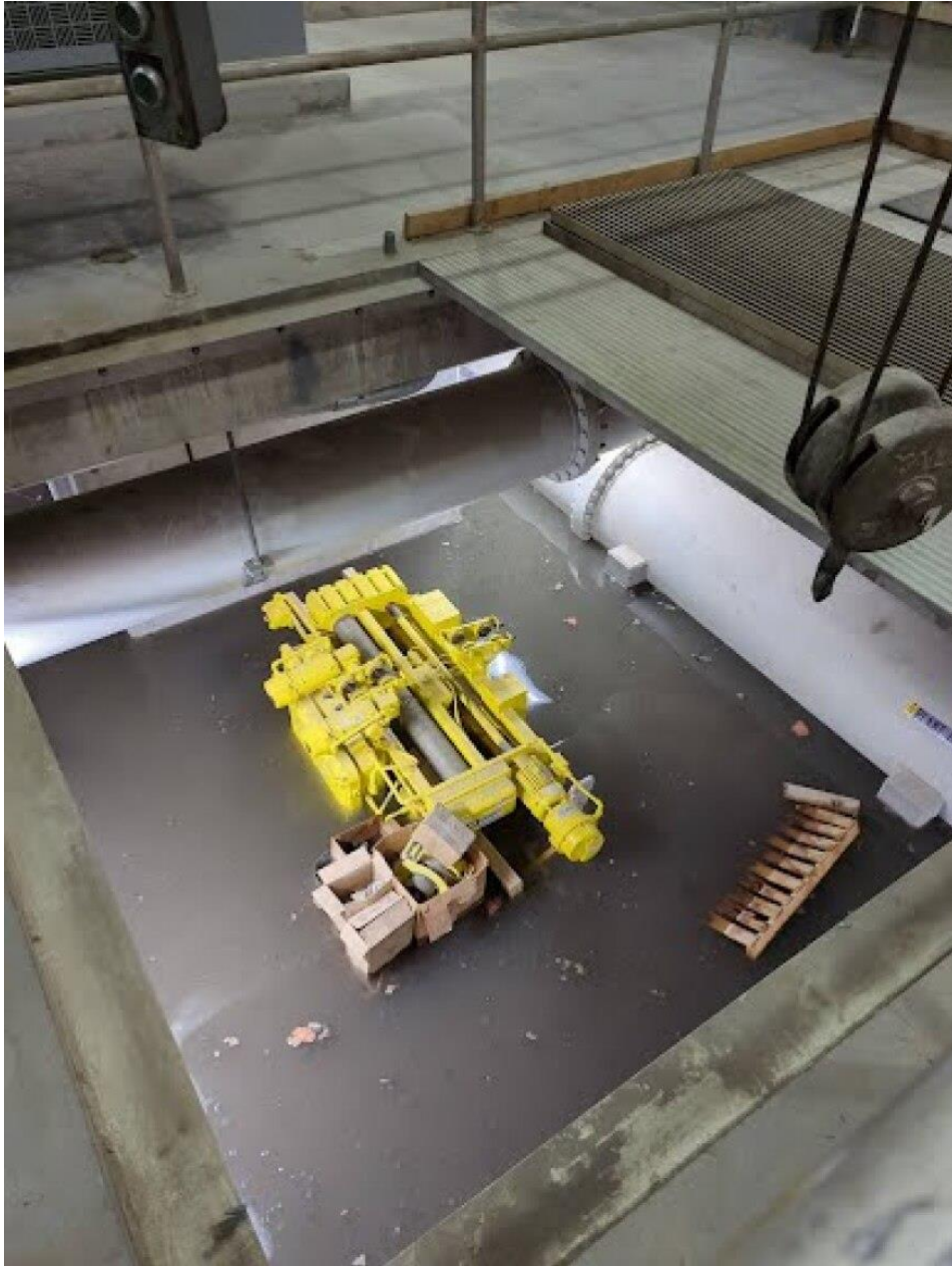


Untreated sewage flooded a portion of the Binghamton Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Plant Friday. (Photo provided by a sewer plant employee who requested to remain anonymous out of fear of retribution.)

Updated: 2/23/22 – 3:15 P.M.

VESTAL, NY (WSKG) — Officials at the Binghamton Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment plant say a large pipe appeared to burst in the facility Friday morning causing partially treated wastewater to flood part of the facility.

Joint Sewage Board Chairman George Kolba said an apparent pipe burst occurred shortly after 5 a.m. Friday and was quickly contained by plant staff. Kolba also said that effluent coming from the plant is being “dispersed in the correct way.”



A flooded portion of the Binghamton-Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Plant. (Photo provided by a sewer plant employee who requested to remain anonymous out of fear of retribution.)

“Right now, they're isolating everything, making sure the electricity and everything is off so it's safe for our people to go in there and start doing the cleanup process, which is probably going to take us into the nighttime until we can get somebody and that's it,” Kolba said. “And after that we'll go from there.”

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) said in a [statement to WSKG](#) that it's conducting an inspection of the facility Friday.

“[Binghamton Johnson City Sewage Treatment Plant] staff took immediate action to bypass the affected infrastructure and make required notifications, including issuing a NYAlert,” the DEC's statement read in part. “Screening, primary treatment, and disinfection of wastewater prior to entering the Susquehanna River is continuing, as it did during the recent construction upgrade, and the release is not anticipated to cause any impacts to public drinking water supplies.”

Kolba, who spoke to WSKG shortly after 9 a.m. Friday said several feet of “media”— untreated or partially treated sewage — still need to be cleaned up before plant staff can assess the exact cause of the problems.

“What's happening now is anybody's guess because it's going to take- it's isolated and it's got to turn around and it's going to be hours and hours of cleanup before anybody can go in there and assess what really did happen,” Kolba said.

Photos sent to WSKG by a plant employee who preferred not to be named due to fear of retribution show several feet of wastewater pooling in parts of the facility.

The joint sewage treatment plant had been under a consent order with the DEC until earlier this month.* The facility is wrapping up its nearly [\\$278 million](#) restoration and rehabilitation capital project, which has been ongoing for much of the past decade.

The capital project involved a massive overhaul of most of the plant's facility following a catastrophic wall collapse in May 2011 and the flood following Tropical Storm Lee later that year.

Most of the physical work on the project at the facility has been completed. But the city, which serves as the lead agency overseeing the project, is still working to finish processing invoices and other administrative [aspects](#). Former

Binghamton Mayor Rich David said in his 2022 [budget address](#) in September that the project was “recently completed.” But the city has extended employment contracts with [part time project analysts](#) to process invoices and handle other accounting work several times since then.

Kolba, who represents Johnson City on the joint sewage board, said it’s too soon to know for sure if Friday’s situation involved work done as part of the restoration and rehabilitation project.

Kolba said the plant’s superintendent, Elliott Wagner, is on vacation this week. Binghamton City Engineer Ron Lake, who oversees the capital project as part of his role, said at a previous meeting of the sewage board that he would also be on vacation throughout February.

The city is still in litigation with contractors associated with the 2011 wall collapse. Last week, the sewage board voted to [encumber](#) \$900,000 from its 2021 budget to cover legal fees as the case heads to trial in September.

**This story has been updated to reflect that the consent order on the Joint Sewage Treatment Plant is no longer in place.*