

Dec 36

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

TO ALL MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS AND OTHERS WHO MAY BE CONCERNED

The State Department of Health, acting upon information it has been able to acquire concerning the operation of the new federal program of public works construction, feels that it is decidedly in the public interest to acquaint you with what it believes to be the facts.

The recent Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1936, which provides \$1,425,000,000 for relief projects, in addition to \$300,000,000 reappropriated for federal aid on approved projects undertaken through the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. Thus, a large sum of money has been made available for the construction of public works improvements with federal aid. That such money will be spent and that many communities will profit by taking advantage of such aid, there seems to be no doubt.

In many communities in this State there is an urgent need for the installation of sewage treatment plants to eliminate objectionable stream pollution, the construction or extension of modern sewer systems to provide for the needs and convenience of people living in built-up areas where privies, cesspools, and other individual sewage disposal devices cause conditions of nuisance and a menace to health, and the construction of water extensions or improvements in public water supplies. Public opinion is overwhelmingly agreed that sanitary improvements of the kind outlined above are a fundamental public health need in every community. It is the belief of this Department that within a very short time all communities of any appreciable size in New York State will be equipped with public supplies of safe attractive water and modern sewer systems with sewage treatment plants to eliminate the objectionable pollution of natural waters. The rapidly increasing public interests in recreational facilities, such as swimming, together with the increased use of surface waters as sources of public water supplies which now furnish water to more than 75 per cent of the people of the state are some of the factors which point to an accelerated program of stream pollution abatement. Recently a number of bills were introduced in Congress providing for federal control over stream pollution, which is indicative of the nation wide interest in this matter.

The State Department of Health, therefore, feels that inasmuch as many of these improvements will have to be made within a relatively short time, municipalities should now give very serious consideration to proceeding with their construction while federal aid is available. Failure by any municipalities to appreciate the opportunities which now exist for securing the advantages of federal aid will probably result a little later on in very material increases in the tax burden, when it becomes necessary to make such public improvements wholly at the expense of the municipality.

While it is impossible to make any definite statement regarding the amount of federal aid that can be obtained, as this will depend on the type of work and the ratio of labor and materials cost, it is our understanding that certain types of water and sewer projects developed under the Works Progress Administration may be approved on the basis of the local community furnishing only a part of the cost of materials, resulting in a net cost to the community of about 30 per cent of the total cost of the project with the additional requirement that there is sufficient relief labor available to operate the project. In any event the prospect of enormous savings to municipalities in the construction of approved projects seems assured and no municipality can afford to overlook the opportunity of sharing in the benefits of such a program.

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It is our further understanding that in connection with this new program the Works Progress Administration has made a number of changes in its rules, designed to simplify them. Labor may not be obtained from lists of persons eligible for relief certified by the local welfare commissioners, in place of the former requirement of obtaining labor through the National Employment Service; funds are to be definitely earmarked for specific projects to insure continuity of operation and completion of each job. These and other changes should remove many of the past difficulties and restrictions in obtaining the labor to carry on satisfactorily approved work projects.

Many municipalities now have plans in readiness for the construction of needed sanitary improvements and these should confer at once with the WPA authorities in their districts with the view of undertaking construction as soon as possible. Municipalities which have definite need for sanitary improvements either now or in the near future but which do not have their plans in readiness, should authorize the employment of engineers at once to prepare the necessary plans.

The State Department of Health is anxious to be of assistance in securing for any community of the state the benefits of federal aid for construction of any improvements in the general interests of the public health. To this end the Department to the extent of its facilities will be glad to furnish further information, or confer with local officials in regard to any sanitary projects which any municipality may desire to undertake. Please address all inquiries to the State Department of Health, Albany, N. Y.

Very truly yours,

C. A. Holmquist,
Director, Division of Sanitation

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July 30, 1936