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OSC Investigators Uncover Improper Waste Disposal Arrangement at the Wrightstown Municipal Utilities Authority

TRENTON – An investigation by the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) has uncovered an improper waste disposal arrangement entered into by Thomas Harper, the Mayor of Wrightstown and the Chairman of the Wrightstown Municipal Utilities Authority (WMUA), and Rodman Lucas, the Operations Manager of the WMUA. Without the knowledge of, or consent from, the WMUA Board Members, Lucas' private septage company dumped over 565,000 gallons of private septage at the WMUA for free, bypassing \$21,000 in disposal fees. For more than three years, Lucas' company dumped waste collected from residences and businesses unfiltered and directly into a manhole. During this period, no other private companies were afforded this benefit. OSC has referred its findings to the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General for further investigation.

OSC investigators initiated this inquiry after receiving an anonymous complaint alleging that Lucas' private business, Aqua Clean Toilet Systems, LLC (Aqua Clean), was improperly dumping septage at the WMUA. Through an examination of WMUA meeting minutes, WMUA resolutions, septage collection records from other facilities, and Aqua Clean's internal records, OSC determined that Aqua Clean had deposited hundreds of thousands of gallons of septage at the WMUA for free. Subsequently, OSC conducted interviews with various WMUA and Borough of Wrightstown employees, and obtained sworn testimony from Lucas, Chairman Harper, and the WMUA Board.

The OSC Investigation revealed that Lucas and Harper arranged for Aqua Clean to deposit private septage for free at the WMUA without analyzing the environmental effects the deposits would create, informing the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that the WMUA was accepting septage, or seeking approval from or even informing the WMUA Board. Lucas and Harper gave an ever-evolving set of explanations for the agreement, at times downplaying its importance while also asserting the power to enter into undocumented deals

such as this. Meanwhile, the deal cost the WMUA \$21,000 in fair-market septage acceptance fees.

OSC's investigators found that the methods Aqua Clean used to dump the septage were in contrast with DEP recommendations and best practices followed by other reputable septage treatment facilities. At no time did Lucas, Harper, or the WMUA notify the DEP that the facility was accepting private septage, nor did they take steps to insure that the septage was tested for contaminants and properly filtered before being treated. Further, this improper dumping caused additional work for WMUA employees as they were forced to process this private septage in addition to the waste ordinarily generated by the WMUA's sewer system.

"The actions by the WMUA Operations Manager and Board Chairman uncovered by OSC investigators are alarming," Comptroller Philip James Degnan said. "The residents of Wrightstown deserve to know that the WMUA is properly equipped to treat everything in its system, and is being fairly paid for what it receives. This arrangement between Rodman Lucas and Thomas Harper undermines public confidence in local government and is worthy of further investigation by the Attorney General as well as state ethics and environmental investigators."

OSC is an independent state agency that conducts audits and investigations of government agencies throughout New Jersey. The Office also reviews certain government contracts and works to detect and prevent Medicaid Fraud. The Office strives to enhance the efficiency and transparency of government and to ensure that public funds are spent effectively and efficiently.

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