Road to recovery

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sew´·ẽr sō·ci·ol´ō·gy, *the science of society, social institutions, and social relationships viewed through the eyes of a sewer; specifically, the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective sewer use of organized groups of human beings.*

Most sewer flows are characterized by repeatable diurnal patterns that vary across weekdays, weekends, and holidays. Differences in land use also are apparent, and distractions and disruptions of daily life often can be observed.

This month, we take a look at the effects of the recession through the eyes of a sewer.

The American economy has been through a tremendous slump during the past few years, but it now appears that we are on the road to recovery. The National Bureau of Economics reported that the recent recession began in December 2007 and lasted through June 2009. However, with unemployment still high, many Americans wonder if things really are getting better. We had the same thought and decided to use Sewer Sociology to take a closer look.

The figure below charts sewer use data from a residential area in Southern California from 2005 through 2011. In the small composite hydrographs along the top of the figure, weekdays are shown in green, and weekends are shown in blue. The average weekday sewer use for each year is derived from these data and compared with local unemployment data on the trend lines below.

Prior to the recession, as the population grew during the housing boom, sewer flows increased. However, once the recession started and the unemployment rate jumped, boom turned to bust. The recession brought a decrease in sewer flows, most likely attributable to an increase in home foreclosures.

Since the end of the recession, sewer flows have increased once again, albeit at a much slower pace than before. Nonetheless, this offers some reassurance that the economy is headed back in the right direction.

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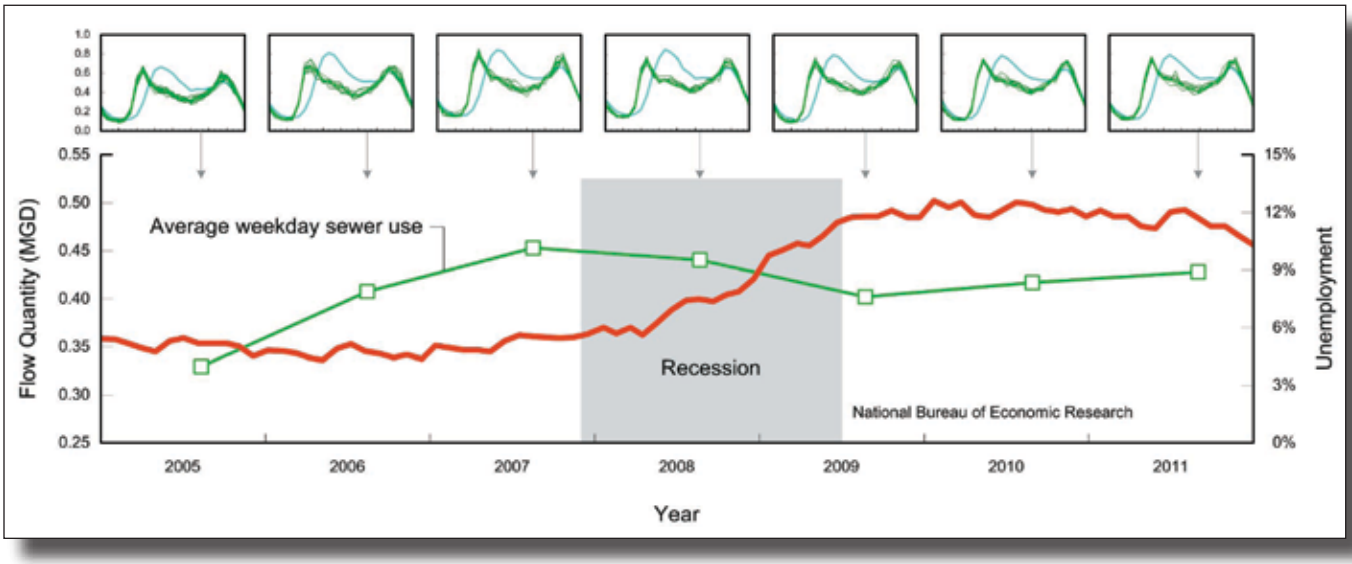
Comparison of residential sewer use and unemployment during economic recession



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