

# The Elephant Theory

## By Mike Dill

Let's start with the easy stuff. The world is round, agreed, water runs downhill, agreed, and everyone knows everything. No way, you say, you are right. The best thing you can do is to know what you don't know. What I mean is we know some things, but not all, but be upfront on what you don't know and ready to admit it. In other words, be the first to say, "I don't know". However, there are consequences to saying, "I don't know", unless you follow it with "but I can find out or find someone who does know". Have the answer and problem is solved. Right, well maybe. The first part of problem solving is to determine what is the problem. Sometimes we are too quick to answer without thorough analysis and the proper thought process. (Love it when I use the big words.) Some problems are easy and some are not.

Question: How do I get from point A to point B?

Answer: The most direct route.

That was easy. But what if there is no direct route, or a detour gets in the way? Complex has a way of getting involved at the most inopportune time.

Where am I going with this, well I don't have a clue because I didn't think this through. Not a good answer. Ok now, we are into problem solving. Break it down into workable parts. My saying is "you can eat an elephant, one bite at a time". So now we have the elephant theory. Keep this theory in mind.

Us lumpy water people have a big elephant on our horizon. It's called CMOM. No matter what we do, if we hang an acronym on it, it sounds better. Well inquiring minds want to know, what is CMOM. Get ready for this: **CAPACITY MANAGEMENT, OPERATION and MAINTENANCE**. Say that three times, never mind fast. What is it and how do we deal with it. Here is my answer "I don't know and I am trying to find out". The key word is trying. Much talk about it, but the details are few. It is being studied and reviewed. It seems everyone has his or her ideas on CMOM. Here is mine: first look at the words and their meanings:

**CAPACITY** = contents or volume

**MANAGEMENT** = to succeed in accomplishing

**OPERATION** = a process of a practical or mechanical nature

**MAINTENANCE** = (*this one is scary*) to keep in condition, operational or in working order. To provide upkeep of.

Find your own definitions, these are from the latest edition of my FUNK & WAGNELL's lumpy water hearsay. Before we get into long drawn out explanations, let's get rid of the fluff and hipe. Boil it down or use the elephant theory. First bite, what are we talking about. Two words, *infiltration* and *inflow*. Acronym = **I & I** or eye and eye. Why do I say eye and eye? This is one of those you have to see it, to fix it. If you have a big "S" on your chest and super man eyes, read no further. Us mortals must find alternative methods. We can see smoke, so let's smoke. Bad idea. Every time you think you have a plan, up pops complex.

Now pay attention, because this is the important part, this is where I tell you how I can't help you. I can't help; this is the self-help part. Your part. You will have to work.

NYRWA has tools and advice to assist you, but you are pretty much on your own. In a nutshell, CMOM means study your collection system, find the problem areas, and fix it. Sounds easy, however "nothin' is ever easy".

First question: do you have good maps of the collection system? Sketches on napkins and matchbooks don't count. Next question: what's in the ground? Diameter and pipe material? Age of the different parts of the system? Depth and types of materials of manholes. So many

questions so few answers. The intent of CMOM is to study, assess, implement and carry out a plan to address I&I issues. Remember the elephant? The first question is, does the system have I&I problems? The answer is simple. If your system is more than twenty minutes old, most likely I&I can be an issue. Very few, and I mean very few systems, don't have I&I in some form or other. The older and larger the collection system, the possibilities are endless. What CMOM wants addressed is implementation and carry out to completion. Too many studies are gathering dust on top of file cabinets or in a draw never to see the light of day. Got to put the plan into action. We have now arrived at a starting point. Go find those old studies and study them. If the past studies have indicated problem areas, you can bet the ranch that those problems still exist. These things don't fix themselves. They stay hidden until that moment you least need another headache. There isn't much in this industry that fixes itself.

Some say TV the system, but remember TV has limitations. Smoke can go places the TV camera can't. Smoke will help identify general areas of concern. TV can better identify the exact problem in a given area. Smoke first, followed by TV. TV work is expensive, so identify the areas of concern first with smoke, and then pinpoint, with TV. Remember, all technologies have limitations, so no one thing can answer all questions. Proper tool for the proper application. Also, remember that this is an ongoing project. Just because you fixed it, doesn't mean it stays fixed. People have a bad habit of saying it will last forever. Remember, forever is a very long time and some definitions do vary. Review and evaluate constantly.

I almost forgot the first and most important part. Does your community have rules, regs or ordinances to address illegal connects to the sewer system? The hard part in enforcement. Words are good, but if you don't back it up, be prepared to pay the price. I'm not talking about fines, although they are a possibility, but what about additional operating costs? Additional costs are like a hidden fine. The difference is fines are paid once; additional costs keep mounting month after month.

NYRWA can help. Give us a call, but remember we don't do the work, that's your part. CMOM is going to be one of those elephants that won't go away. The I&I elephant has an ever-increasing appetite. Start addressing the issue before it eats you up.