



INFORMATION FOR HOMEOWNERS & RESIDENTS

- Facts about Sewer Backup Incidents -

Sewer backups are an unfortunate but common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal departments make every effort to prevent such incidents, they still may occur. The following information is offered to help property owners and residents understand why backups happen, how they can be prevented, and what steps citizens should take if a sewer backup affects their property. The following questions and answers may be helpful:

What causes a sewer backup?

Sanitary sewer overflows can be caused by a number of factors. They usually involve sewer pipe blockages in either main sewer lines or service laterals (lines between buildings and the main line). Causes may include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, system deterioration, insufficient system capacity due to illegal sump pumps, residential or commercial growth, or construction mishaps. In home and office plumbing systems, the main cause is accumulation of grease, tree roots, hair, or solid materials, such as disposable diapers or sanitary napkins that are too large for wastewater pipes to handle. Such materials may cause major backups in city lines as well as in residents' lateral lines. A frequent cause of sewer backups within the city's system, however, is vandalism. Leaves, sticks, rocks, bricks and trash have been found in manholes. We hope you will report observations of any such activity.

Is there anything I can do to prevent sewage backup into my home?

- Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or household drain. It can solidify, collect debris and accumulate in city lines, or build up in your own system.
- Never flush disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, or paper towels down the toilet. They could plug up your drains and may damage your plumbing system.
- If the lateral line in your older home has a jointed pipe system, consider whether the roots of large shrubs or trees near the line could invade and break pipes. It is a good idea to know the location of your lateral line(s). Property maps can often be acquired from your city planning department.
- If the lowest level of your home is below ground level, such as a basement floor drain, it may one day be affected by a backup. One way to prevent sewage backup through such below ground areas is to install a "back-flow valve" on the lowest drain(s). You can also use a plumber's test plug to close these drains when not in use.
- Always make sure that your plumbing system vent pipe is not plugged. (bird and squirrel activity is often the cause)
- For further information about preventive measures, contact a plumber or plumbing supply dealer.

How could a sewer backup affect me?

If the backup occurs in a city maintained line, the wastewater will normally overflow out of the lowest possible opening, which is usually a manhole. However, in some homes—especially those with basements, or where the lowest level is even with the sewer lines—the overflowing wastewater may exit through the home's lower drains and toilets.

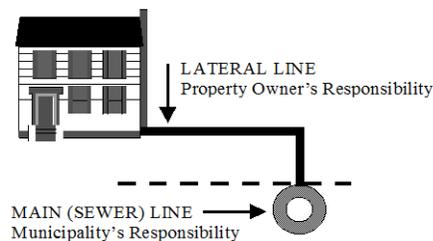
What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?

First, take action to protect people and valuable property:

- Keeping in mind that ceramic plumbing fixtures such as toilets are fragile, quickly close all drain openings with stoppers or plugs. Tub, sink, and floor drains may need additional weight to keep them sealed. A string mop can be used to help plug toilet openings.
- Don't run any water down your drains until the blockage has been cleared. (i.e. dishwashers and laundry should be turned off)
- Call the Wastewater Utility immediately. Numbers are listed at the end of this flyer.
- A quick check with nearby neighbors will help determine if the backup appears to be in your neighbor's wastewater line, and/or widespread in your neighborhood.
- Call a plumber if the problem is in your lateral service line. (seeking quotes for all anticipated work is advised)

If I call the city, what will they do about a sewer backup onto my property?

- You will be asked questions about the backup severity, possible causes, and occurrence frequency, etc.
- City personnel will check for blockages in the main line. In any case, the mainline will be immediately cleaned. It should be noted that mainline cleaning may dislodge obstructions in laterals due to the pressures generated during the process.
- If the main line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumbing or sewer contractor (a list of contractors is available for your convenience) to check your lateral line. Maintenance and repair of the lateral line is the owner's responsibility. (See *diagram below*.)
- To minimize damage and negative health effects, you should arrange for cleanup of the property as soon as possible. There are qualified businesses that specialize in this type of cleanup.
- If the sewer backup onto your property resulted from blockage in the main sewer line it is still advised that you arrange for cleanup. Insurance issues can be dealt with after the health issues are remedied.



What does the municipality do to prevent this problem?

- Every attempt is made to prevent backups in the public wastewater system before they occur. Sewer lines are specially designed to prevent accumulation and stoppages.
- In addition, we have maintenance crews that are devoted to inspecting and cleaning wastewater lines throughout the city on a regular schedule.
- Even with our maintenance schedule, backups are often beyond the city's control. Most that do occur are confined to the sewage pipeline, rather than backing up into a home.

Will insurance cover any damage to my home or property?

- *In the majority of cases, a special rider can be added to your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy to cover damages related to sewage backups or water damage. This optional coverage is usually not very expensive, but you must usually request that it be added to your policy. Call your insurance agent today to discuss this policy option.*
- *As with the majority of municipalities in the country, the city cannot assume financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups that are beyond the city's control. That is why it is important that property owners confirm that they are adequately insured—particularly if areas of their home lie below ground level. It also reinforces the importance of properly maintaining your homes plumbing system through some simple steps mentioned above.*

How and where should I report a sewer backup?

Emergency crews are on call 24 hours a day to assist you. In an emergency such as a sewer line backup, or if you observe any vandalism associated with the wastewater or sewer lines, **contact the Wastewater Utility, M-F from 7am – 3:30pm, at (262)-473-0560. All other hours, please contact (262)-473-0555.**