



INFORMATION FOR CITY HOMEOWNERS & RESIDENTS

- Facts About Sewer Backup Incidents -



Sewer backups unfortunately occur in U.S. cities and towns. Although the City makes 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, 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 water stoppages within the City's system, however, is vandalism. Leaves, sticks, rocks, bricks and trash have been found stuffed down manholes. We hope you will report observations of any such activity to the City's Police Department.

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.

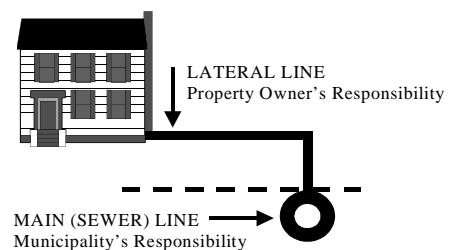
What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?

First, when you notice the backup, call the City's Public Works Department at [815-459-2020](tel:815-459-2020) (if dialing this number after hours, dial the number and then press one) and then take action to protect people and valuable property:

- 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. Keep in mind that ceramic plumbing fixtures such as toilets are fragile.
- Don't run any water down your drains until the blockage has been cleared.
- 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.
- Following the City's inspection of the main line, call a plumber if the problem is in your lateral service.

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

- You will be asked questions about the backup timing, location, the property at risk, etc.
- City personnel will check for blockages in the main line. If found, the blockage will be cleared as soon as possible.
- If the main line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumbing or sewer contractor 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, City personnel will explain what the City can immediately do to help take care of the problem.





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 stop 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).
- 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.
- For further information about preventive measures, contact a plumber or plumbing supply dealer.

What does the City 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.
- The City uses a grease control agent at City lift stations to prevent the buildup of items that may block the main sewer line.
- Even with our maintenance schedule, however, 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 will need to 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. Check with your insurance agent about this policy provision.

As with the majority of municipalities in the country, the City cannot assume financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most stoppages are related to conditions 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.

Call your insurance agent today to have this coverage added to your policy.

How and where should I report a sewer backup?

City 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, [call 815-459-2020](tel:815-459-2020). If dialing this number after hours, dial the number and then press one; then tell the operator that you have a sewer problem and need assistance from the City's Sewer and Lifts Division.

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parts water) are the most effective disinfectants, but may cause discoloration of many materials.

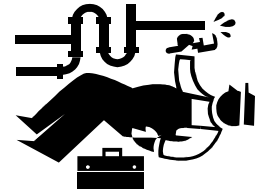
- Flush out and disinfect plumbing fixtures.
- Remove and discard carpet and steam clean or discard drapes.
- Remove and discard upholstered furniture and porous wood furniture stained by sewage.
- Sanitize and clean hardwood furniture, then thoroughly wipe, dry and apply an oil-based wood polish.
- Sanitize and repair, or remove and discard, paneling, wallboard or wall coverings.
- Clean up appliances or ductwork. If electric motors, wiring or insulation have been saturated, have a qualified service technician remove the motor, dry it, and inspect it for damage before plugging it back in and turning it on.
- Ventilate the affected area with floor fans and a dehumidifier, if available, to properly dry the area. If it has not been directly contacted by water, activate the building's heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system, turn on exhaust or ceiling fans and open windows and doors when conditions are favorable.
- Do not use heat to dry closed building interiors; mildew and expanded water damage may result.

- After the initial cleaning, a second sanitized cleaning should take place.

Information for City Homeowners and Residents: Coping With a Sewer Backup

For More Information Call the City's
Sewer and Lifts Division at:
815-459-2020

If dialing this number after hours, dial the number and then press one; then tell the operator that you have a sewer problem and need assistance from the City's Sewer and Lifts Division.



PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SEWER AND LIFTS DIVISION
100 W. Woodstock Street
Crystal Lake, IL 60014
(815) 459-2020

When a sewer backup occurs....

City Assistance

If you have a backup, call us 24 hours a day at 815-459-2020. If dialing this number after hours, dial the number and then press one; then tell the operator that you have a sewer problem and need assistance from the City's Sewer and Lifts Division. We will dispatch a maintenance crew to your address to find out if the stoppage is in the City main or your private line (sewer lateral). If the sewer main is found to be clear, it is the responsibility of the property owner to call a licensed plumber or drain service to correct the problem. The City cannot recommend a specific plumber, but many plumbers are listed in the phone book. Check references to be sure you're dealing with a reputable plumber.

The City will not pay for private plumber bills unless the City directs a plumber to solve a problem that is the City's responsibility. If the stoppage is in the City main we will fix it as quickly as possible and keep you informed about what is being done.

What You Can Do

A sewer backup creates a stressful and emotional situation for all affected parties. Potentially it may cause health and safety exposures as well as significant property loss. Proper responses to sewer backups can greatly minimize losses from negative health effects and property damages. Every backup is unique and will require different responses, but there are some universal principles that can be applied to all situations.

Sewer backup can lead to disease, destruction of your valuables, damage to your house, and the risk of electrocution. Prompt cleanup of affected property can help minimize the inconvenience and damage. ***You should immediately arrange for a thorough, professional, sanitized cleanup of your affected property:***

- If a dishwasher, washing machine, shower, bathtub, toilet or other water fixture is operating, shut it off immediately.
- Quickly close all drain openers 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 toilets.
- Keep children and animals out of the affected area.
- Potential health and safety hazards must be identified and, if possible, eliminated prior to implementing cleaning or restoration procedures. Before entering the affected area realize that the potential for electrical shock hazards and gas leaks must be assessed.
- Unplug all electrical appliances, small electrical devices on wet floor covering or other wet areas, and turn off the circuit breakers supplying electricity to affected areas.
- Turn off the gas (or other fuel source) to your furnace or heater and hot water heater.
- Call the City's Sewer and Lifts Division so that its employees can check to make sure our main lines are not plugged.

- Move any uncontaminated property away from the affected areas.
- Take before-and-after photos of the affected areas.

Sewage and floodwaters contain bacteria and other hazardous microorganisms. These can be transmitted by touching contaminated items or by tracking them into uncontaminated areas on shoes. Children and pets are especially vulnerable. Frequent hand washing with hot, soapy water is an important preventative measure.

Cleaning and sanitizing is most effective when performed by professional service companies. Check your phone book for a reputable service company. A thorough cleanup should include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Wear waterproof boots or waders and heavy-duty rubber gloves and eye protection. To remove gloves, turn them inside out, without touching the contaminated exterior. Dispose of them properly.
- Treat all water soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as unhealthy until properly cleaned and sanitized.
- Do not use any electrical equipment while standing in water.
- Wet-vacuum or remove spillage.
- Operate wet vacuums only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.
- Mop bare floors and wipe walls with a bleach solution, soap and disinfectants. Bleach solutions (one part bleach to ten

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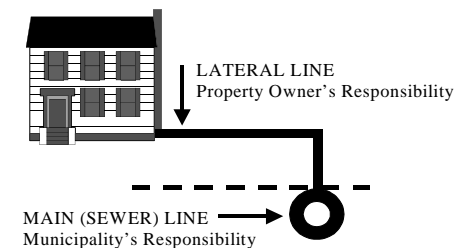
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SEWER AND LIFTS DIVISION
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Crystal Lake, IL 60014
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