

## SEWER BACKUPS

Sewage usually moves from the pipes inside your home or business through your sewer lateral to the public sewer mains to the City's Water Reclamation Center for treatment. However, when this course reverses for any reason, it can cause major headaches. The following information can assist you in the event of a backup.

### **Who to Call:**

The first thing you should do if you experience a sewage backup is call the Division of Water and Sewer. During normal business hours (7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m, Monday – Friday) they can be contacted at 754-3097. **After hours, weekends, and holidays or if you fail to get a response at the division's number, call the City's emergency dispatch center at 754-3000 who will contact the on call foreman for response. During sewer backup situations, please do not rely on voice or e-mail messages as these are generally only reviewed during normal business hours.**

### **Determining the Problem:**

Upon receipt of a backup call, division personnel will respond to check the public sewer main to determine whether the problem is in the main or in your sewer lateral. If the problem is caused by a blockage in the main, City crews will address the problem. If the problem is in your sewer lateral, you will be advised to hire a plumber to inspect the line and remove any obstructions.

### **Insurance:**

The majority of backups that occur are the result of problems in the customer's sanitary lateral. In these instances the customer is responsible for all costs resulting from the problem. It should be noted that many insurance policies do not cover sewer backups unless special coverage is purchased. The City strongly encourages that all sewer customers review their policy to determine whether they have coverage. If a sewer backup could impact finished living space, your business, or cause other hardships you may wish to consider purchasing the additional coverage.

The City conducts routine cleaning and inspection of the sanitary sewer system to assure its proper operation. However, backups in the City mains may occur as a result of situations beyond our control such as the introduction of inappropriate materials into the main such as grease poured down the drain, diapers flushed down the toilet or sticks pushed into manholes; heavy rains; or tree roots entering the line through laterals or joints. In most such instances, the City is not held responsible for damage caused by a backup unless negligence by the City can be proven. If you experience damage that you feel is a direct result of the City's negligence, you can file an insurance claim with our Finance Department which can be reached at 754-3005 during normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday - Friday.

## **Clean Up:**

The City does not assist with cleanup of private property resulting from problems in the sewer lateral. If the cleanup is major, there are companies that can assist. If you have sewer backup coverage, you should coordinate any contracted cleaning with your insurance company. The Ohio Department of Health offers tips on how to undertake the cleaning yourself at:

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/ASSETS/E50B8256047E49E79A38C7AAFFAF7617/sewbacku.p.PDF>

## **Prevention:**

Preventive measures can help reduce the potential for a backup or minimize their impact. Following are some suggested guidelines:

1. Freeze the Grease, Save the Drain – one of the biggest culprits of lateral blockages is grease and oil used or resulting from cooking. Rather than pouring that grease or oil down the drain, put it in a disposable container (such as an empty milk carton or food can). To make it easier to dispose, put it in the freezer until it is set and then throw away in the trash can.
2. Know Where Your Cleanout Is – current code requires that every new sewer lateral installation include a sanitary sewer cleanout. This portal to your lateral makes it easier to inspect and clean the line. Do not cover it with dirt or other landscaping materials as when you need it you want to be able to find it quickly. Check the cap routinely to assure that it is in place and in one piece as a broken or missing top can allow the entrance of rainwater increasing your risk of a backup during heavy storm events. If you have an older home without a cleanout, you may wish to consider installing one.
3. Choose and Plant Trees Carefully – Don't plant trees or shrubs above or near your sewer lateral to prevent their roots from entering the line through cracks and joints. Avoid placing species that have more aggressive roots systems such as birch, willow, poplar, ash, and elm in the part of the yard where your sewer is located.
4. Maintain Your Line – Before buying a house you should make sure that a sewer line inspection is conducted. For the best results the contractor conducting the inspection should use a lateral inspection camera and provide you with a copy of the results. Do not overlook any problem in the sewer lines. Slow draining sewers may be the first indication of a bigger problem.
5. Remove Storm Drain Connections – if you have storm drain connections that convey water from roofs, foundations, sump pumps, yards or other areas into your sewer lateral you should remove them. These are actually illegal connections and subject your home to a higher potential for backup during rain events. These types of fixtures should be connected to the storm sewer system (for more information on how to connect to the storm sewer system contact the City's Engineering Division at 754-3055)

6. Consider Installation of a Backwater Valve – if you have experienced frequent backups you may wish to consider installation of a backwater valve. This valve is a fixture put on a sewer line, and sometimes a drain line, in the basement of your home or building foundation to prevent sewer backups. A properly installed backwater valve works on a one-way system; sewage can go out, but not back in. Once installed, these become part of your private system and should be maintained in accordance to the manufacturer/installer's instructions.
7. Review Your Insurance – review your insurance policy to determine whether you have coverage for sewer backups. Most general policies do not include this as a benefit. If yours does not, you may wish to consult with your agent as to whether it might be of benefit to add this coverage.

**Definitions:**

Sewer lateral – The sewer lateral is a private line that takes the sewage from the building to the City's sewer main. The responsibility for maintenance of this line from the property to the City's main lies with the property owner and/or resident

Sewer main – These are the large pipes that collect the sewage from the laterals and convey it to the Water Reclamation Center. They are maintained by the Division of Water and Sewer.

Water Reclamation Center – this facility treats the raw sewage to remove waterborne material to allow it to be discharged back to the environment.