

Sewer Backup Facts and Prevention

Sewer backups are an unfortunate but common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although wastewater agency 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 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 District lines as well as in residents' lateral lines. A frequent cause of water stoppages within an Agency'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.

How Could a Sewer Backup Affect Me?

If the backup occurs in a District 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 Does the District 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 District on a regular schedule.
- Degreasing chemicals are sometimes also injected into lines in areas that are prone to stoppages, such as those near restaurants, apartments or high density housing developments.
- Even with our maintenance schedule, however, backups are often beyond the District's control.
- Most that do occur are confined to the sewage pipeline, rather than backing up into a home.

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What Should I Do if Sewage Backs Up into My Home?

- 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.
- 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. In this case, call the District immediately.
- Call a plumber if the problem is in your lateral service line.
- 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.

How 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 our water or wastewater facilities, please contact us immediately.

Call Us at 330-874-3262

Is There Anything I Can Do to Prevent a Sewage Backup In My Home?

- Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or household drain. It can solidify, collect debris and accumulate in District lines, or build up in your own plumbing system and lateral.
- 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) and cleanouts.
- 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.

Will Insurance Cover Any Damage to My Home or Property?

- In the majority of cases, a special rider may be 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 public agencies in the country, the District cannot assume financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most stoppages are related to conditions that are beyond the Agency'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.
- Consider contacting your insurance agent today to have this sewer spill protection coverage added to your policy.