

Sanitary Sewer Backup Reduction Program:

A Guide for Members

OMAG

“Our mission is to be the primary provider of insurance and risk management solutions to help Oklahoma cities and towns improve the quality of life for their citizens.”



**STANDARD
OPERATING
GUIDELINES**

OMAG Risk Management Services

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SECTION 1: General Program Information

OVERVIEW

All public wastewater operators have a responsibility to maintain their sewer systems – both to protect citizens and property that may be damaged due to sewer backups, and to reduce the operator’s exposure to claims and litigation.

The public agency has a duty of care to assure that:

1. Sewer systems have been correctly designed and installed.
2. Sewer systems are adequately maintained through planned inspections and repair.
3. Emergency response plans are established to deal with sewer blockages and backups.
4. Property owners affected by sewer backups receive information and support they need.

A Sewer Use Ordinance helps assure public cooperation in these efforts (**sample Sewer Ordinances, adopted by other public agencies, can be obtained through OMAG Risk Management Services. Be sure to have legal counsel review any proposed ordinance prior to passage by your governing body**).

Please contact OMAG Risk Management Services staff if you need further information or assistance.

SAMPLE SEWER BACKUP POLICY

(Municipality/Agency Letterhead)

SEWER BACKUP MANAGEMENT POLICY

It is the responsibility of (name of municipality/agency) to adequately preserve the integrity of its sewer system. Sewer systems must be kept in good repair and free from obstructions that may hinder the system and cause damage, financial loss, or inconvenience to its citizens.

All (name of municipality/agency) personnel are expected to follow the procedures outlined in this manual, fulfilling their duty to prevent sewer backup incidents to the best of their ability.

It is the responsibility of senior management personnel to assure that appropriate personnel are assigned, adequately trained, and held accountable for following all required sewer backup prevention procedures.

This policy has been adopted on the _____ day of _____, 20__.

(signature)

Name, Title

(signature)

Name, Title

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

System Design:

New sewer system components should be designed by qualified engineers and installed by contractors in accordance with accepted engineering specifications. Repairs or improvements to existing sewer lines must use high quality durable materials.

Sewer Ordinance:

The public wastewater operator should have a Sewer Ordinance (samples available from OMAG Risk Management Services) that requires installation of cleanouts in all new construction according to the uniform plumbing code and encourages installation of back-flow preventers on the lowest drains of all existing buildings. Restaurants, laundry facilities, and other appropriate commercial facilities should install grease traps (at minimum this should be applicable to all new or remodeled connections). Property owners should be prohibited from directing sump pumps and downspouts into the sewer system. The requirements of this ordinance should be clearly communicated to all property owners/residents on a periodic basis.

Preventive Inspections, Cleaning, & Maintenance:

The formal sewer inspection and cleaning program to be followed should include:

- Schedules for planned inspection routes in every area of the municipality. Local standards will determine how frequently sewer system lines should be flushed, jetted, or rodded. As a general guideline, it is recommended that inspection and/or maintenance of the entire public sewer system take place every 36-60 months.
- Schedules for more frequent inspection of potential problem areas, as identified by previous inspections, customer service complaints, history of overflows, or consulting engineer studies (e.g. intruding vegetation or tree roots, low spots in sewer lines, excess debris sources, etc.).
- Lift stations should be equipped with power failure and high-level alarms that notify a staffed location or on-call person. An alternative power source should be available to maintain operation of facilities during power outages.

- A process of monitoring, documenting, and gauging inflows so that lift stations and facilities have adequate staffing and monitoring during periods of heavy flow.
- Audio/Visual monitoring of lines with OMAG's *SL-Rat program and CCTV cameras on a regular basis is suggested. It is recommended that inspection and/or maintenance of the entire public sewer system take place every 36-60 months.
- Testing of sewer line connections during installation, making repairs where necessary.
- Cleaning of sewer lines where evidence of impeded flow is found.
- Procedures for avoiding an excess surge in downstream lines when flushing lines or removing blockages must be in place.
- Repair or replacement of aging system components and those that have suffered deterioration.
- A log for documenting when each line and manhole has been inspected, cleaned, or repaired (see: Sewer Inspection & Maintenance Report pg.13, and Manhole Inspection Checklist pg.14).

Note: * SL-Rat (Sewer Line Rapid Assessment Tool) is an auditory assessment tool owned by OMAG which can be loaned out to cities/towns to assess and map their sanitary sewer systems. This service is at no cost to the municipality.

SEWER BACKUP RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Office Response to a Sewer Overflow/Backup Report:

Proper and professional response by public wastewater operator personnel when an individual home or business owner reports a sewer backup problem can greatly minimize stress and loss from such incidents. A stressed caller should be treated with consideration and empathy. The call should be accepted or quickly referred to the proper department, and the following information gathered or provided:

- Location of the sewer backup and the name of the caller.
- The scope of backup and any immediate risks to people or property.
- Clear information about how the public wastewater operators will respond and when.
- Suggestions for proper precautions the owner can take to minimize loss (See: Sewer Backup Intake Report, pg.15).

Field Response to a Sewer Backup Report:

Timely action taken by field personnel will vary, depending on the situation. It is vital that the individual who reported the backup be met calmly. Full respect shall be shown for the owner's property and possessions.

- Follow the Sewer Backup Emergency Response Plan as directed.
- The supervisor on site is to give details to the owner what the crew will be looking for during the inspection.
- Inspect the sewer backup area and take steps to protect people and property that may be at immediate risk (See: Sewer Backup Report, pg 16).
- Take all necessary steps to determine the cause of the backup:
 - Check the flow in manholes above and below the backup location
 - CCTV the lines to find and help document the problem
- Quickly arrange to correct the problem if it is determined to be in the main sewer line:
 - If a blockage has caused the backup, remove the cause of the blockage and try to preserve it as evidence.
 - If necessary, pump out the blocked area first, to avoid excess downstream surge.

- Never discuss matters of legal claims or liability for damage. Explain that the claims adjuster will investigate and make final decisions regarding responsibility based on the facts.
- If the blockage problem was in the owner's lateral line, clearly explain to the owner/user what they must do to have the problem repaired.
- Provide a list of local plumbing/sewer line repair companies or suggest the look up providers in the internet. Do Not make recommendations. (Having a current list of licensed plumbers could be helpful).
- Owners should be left with a letter detailing next steps that should be taken as well as how to file a claim with the municipality/agency (See: Backup Letter, pg. 19).

SEWER BACKUP INVESTIGATIONS

Documented sewer backups are important for preserving the integrity of the sewer system, providing coverage information, and reducing the risk of litigation against the public wastewater operator.

1. An analysis of the frequency and severity of sewer backup incidents can provide information to identify vulnerable areas of the system, the need for changes in inspection schedules, or a lack of accountability by wastewater personnel.
2. Accurate information helps OMAG Claims Services establish claim responsibility. If a claims adjuster is contacted by a claimant, it is critical that they have been prepared with accurate information about the incident, so they can discuss liability issues and options for the claimant.
3. In the event that property owner/tenant wishes to file a claim, all sewer backup reports received and investigations completed should be immediately documented and reported to OMAG Claims Services within one (1) business day.
 - a. The initial report should indicate the time of the complaint, name of the caller, personnel that received the complaint, and to whom the complaint was forwarded. (See: Initial Sewer Backup Intake Report, pg.15)
 - b. The onsite investigation should be thoroughly documented at the time of the site visit, answering all questions on the checklist that can be determined. (See: Sewer Backup Report, pg.16)
 - c. Additional follow-up investigations may also be important – particularly if there has been any question as to responsibility for the backup, or if something could be done to improve future responses. (See: Sewer Claim Investigation, pg.19)
 - d. A general liability report of incident should be filled out and forwarded to OMAG Claims Services. (See: General Liability Report of Incident, pg.21)
4. Copies of all reports, documentation, videos, photographs, and causal evidence should be forwarded to the designated operator personnel and to OMAG Claims Services representative as soon as possible.

SEWER BACKUP EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

An emergency response plan should be developed to assure that applicable personnel are prepared to take timely and professional action in the case of a sewer backup incident. The plan should include at least the following:

- Primary response personnel designated for all areas of the municipality, including names, titles, and emergency phone numbers. (See: Reference & Emergency Contact list, pg.22)
- Back up personnel to be contacted should the primary staff be unreachable. (See: Reference & Emergency Contact list, pg.22)
- Police & Fire Department phone numbers (non-emergency) to inform them that the municipality is tending to a sewer line problem.
- Specialty contractor information that may be needed for plumbing/sewer line repair, cleanup, or engineering consultation. Contractors' business, emergency mobile numbers, and insurance information should be on record and updated annually.
- Names and phone numbers of any regional regulatory or environmental agencies that should be informed of a sewer backup or wastewater problem.
- Name of assigned management personnel who are authorized to speak to the media in the event of a major problem that may affect the larger community or citizens lives. All personnel should know the name of said authorized media spokesperson and refer any questions to them.
- A list of emergency cleanup or pumping equipment and knowledge of where it is stored should be available.
- A power failure backup system should be in place, as well as a failure alarm system for all lift stations or sewer pump stations.
- Alarms should notify a staffed location, or 24-hour "on call" staff. Alarm systems should be tested at least annually.
- OMAG Claims Services contact information.

LEGAL & LIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Operators may be held liable for damages that arise from preventable sewage backups in the public sewer system. A public wastewater operator has a duty to exercise “ordinary and reasonable care” to maintain and keep its sewer system free from obstructions. This generally equates to regular and responsible sewer system repair and maintenance.

The operator is liable for sewage back-ups if it had “notice” and “failed to respond in a reasonable amount of time” to remediate the problem causing the back-up. Typically, “notice” means that the operator knew or should have known there were problems with the line(s) servicing the property owner’s home or business. Notice can take the form of a phone call made to the operator about prior issues or it may be that the operator was performing work or maintenance on that service line in the recent past. A reasonable amount of time generally is 24 to 72 hours depending on factors such as, the operator’s manpower, weather conditions, ability to get a contractor or parts, etc. If the operator responds in a reasonable amount of time under the circumstances and remediates the problem this will provide a defense in litigation. There are also certain “acts of God,” like heavy rainfall, that may provide a legal defense as well.

Responding to Liability Questions:

All employees and elected officials should refrain from discussing findings or observations about the causes of a sewer backup with a claimant, the claimant’s service contractor, insurance company, or the media. Don’t readily admit liability for a sewer backup. This is an important aspect of employee training. If an individual raises questions about legal responsibility, they should be advised that OMAG’s Claims adjustors will complete the investigation into legal liability, coverage, and damage.

Keys to Avoiding Litigation:

The most important things to limit the liability of the operator is:

- A regular maintenance program is in place
- Inspections and repairs are thoroughly documented
- Reports of problems are given quick response
- Citizens are treated with courtesy, consideration, and given requested information
- OMAG Claims adjustors are provided with timely sewer backup reports so that questions from claimants can be promptly answered

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Employee Qualifications and Training

Wastewater employees should meet all state required qualifications for licensing and should receive regular, updated training in:

- Cleaning and inspection methods and procedures
- The use of cleaning equipment
- All aspects of the Sanitary Sewer Overflow and Emergency Response Plans
- Appropriate measures to take for cleaning up a sewer backup incident and minimizing further damage
- Education in the source and control of bloodborne pathogens, including use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Designated personnel should be trained to investigate conditions that might have caused the backup, and to record the extent of property damage
- Employees must thoroughly understand that the public wastewater operator may not be responsible for blockages/problems that occur in the service lateral if it is not considered to be part of the public sewer system, but is a private line for which the property owner is responsible
- Employees must also be trained to understand the importance of providing citizens with courteous, accurate information about responsibility for backups, but must refer legal or liability questions to claims adjusters
- All training should be documented and updated at least annually

Community Education:

Information should be provided to residential and business customers through public access channels, general education brochures, or in flyers for those that have suffered back-flow problems. Among other facts of interest, these brochures should explain:

- What may cause sewer backup problems
- How to help prevent sewer backup incidents by avoiding the deposit of grease or bulky non-soluble items (i.e. flushable wipes) down drains or toilets

- The value of back-flow preventers for below-ground building levels and drains, and techniques for periodically inspecting them
- How and where to report a sewage backup problem
- Ordinances, including legal responsibilities for lateral lines
- How to purchase sewer backup endorsements through an insurance agency

SECTION 2: Forms & Documentation

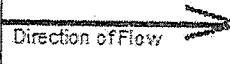
The following are sample forms and checklists offered for OMAG member use and/or customization in developing a comprehensive sewer backup loss prevention program for your municipality or authority.

Please, feel free to incorporate whatever forms may be useful to your organization, change them in any way that meets your needs, and add your own letterhead or logos.

SEWER INSPECTION & MAINTENANCE REPORT

Section _____

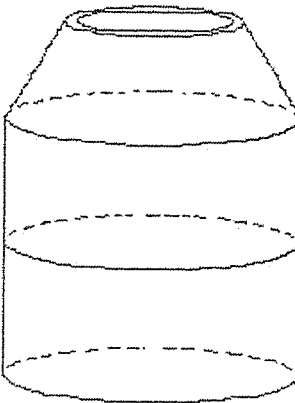
Routine Line Maintenance Work Order/Report

					
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; font-size: small;"> <i>This info field verified on / by:</i> </div>	Date Last Jetted:		Diameter (in):		
	JF Cycle (Months):		Length (ft):		
	Next JF Due Date:		Slope (%):		
	Date Last Root Cut:		Is Pipe Lined:		
	Last TV'd:		Pipe Material:		
			Location:		
		Ext-A-Jet Req:			
Street/Address and Comments:					
Work Performed: JF RS _____ Crew: _____ Date: _____					
Is Flow Normal? YES / NO					
Is Grease Built Up? YES / NO					
Is Color Normal? YES / NO					
Any Unusual Odor? YES / NO					
Does MH Surcharge? YES / NO					
Percent of Pipe Full when running Clean:					

MANHOLE INSPECTION CHECKLIST

Section _____

Manhole _____ Investigation Report

Address: _____		
Cross Street: _____		
<i>Circle all those that apply</i>		
Located:	STREET FRONT REAR OTHER	
MH Cover fit:	LOOSE TIGHT SEALED BOLTED	
Riser Ring Condition:	SOUND BROKEN OFFSET	
Cone Material:	PRECAST BRICK BLOCK	
Cone Condition:	GOOD DETERIORATING POOR	
Floor Condition:	GOOD FAIR POOR NONE DEPOSITS	
Steps Condition:	GOOD FAIR POOR NONE	
Invert Condition:	GOOD FAIR POOR NONE	
Is There Infiltration?	YES NO	Estimated Flow: _____ GPD
Manhole Depth:	_____ ft.	
Describe and Sketch Defects and Locations		
RING _____		
WALLS _____		
INVERT _____		
CONE _____		
FLOOR _____		
Crew: _____		
Date: _____		
To assist with scheduling repairs, describe any access problems or equipment requirements:		

Are Locates Required to make Repairs? YES NO		
T: _____	R: _____	S: _____ Ser No.: _____

SEWER BACKUP INTAKE REPORT

Complete this checklist each time a backup is reported. Help the caller remain calm and rational. Show empathy and maintain a professional manner. Never insinuate or admit any fault on the part of the caller or the public wastewater department. In the event emergency operators (911 centers) are used in off hours, the form and instructions should be edited to provide ease of use, while gathering the most important information.

Name of Caller: _____

Date of Call: _____ Time of Call (a.m./p.m. _____

Approximate date & time of overflow, if different than above: _____ a.m./p.m.

The location address or nearest cross street: _____

Location of overflow (basement, bathroom, laundry room, etc. _____

Approximate area of overflow: _____

Immediate health or safety concerns: _____

Property at risk or affected by the overflow: _____

Is the overflow expanding, stationary, or receding? _____

What has or is being done by the caller or others to contain the overflow?

The Callers Phone Number: _____

INSTRUCTIONS TO GIVE THE CALLER

1. Instruct the caller to take precautions to minimize damage and potential health effects:
 - Keep children, pets, and others out of the backup area
 - Electrical appliances in affected areas present a electrocution hazard
 - Move uncontaminated property away from the backup area
2. Clearly communicate who will be out to the location and approximately when they should arrive
3. Explain what area(s) the responders may need to access (backyard, bathroom, etc.)
4. Give the caller your name, title, and phone number
5. Never respond to questions about legal responsibility; Explain the Claims Adjuster will investigate and determine responsibility for the backup.
6. Document all of the information by written report and if possible by recording the call
7. Quickly refer the call and forward a copy of this intake report to the appropriate department and to OMAG Claims Services.

SEWER CLAIM INCIDENT REPORT

Address: _____

Owner Name & Phone Number: _____

Date of Backup: _____

Claim Number: _____

Date of Incident Evaluation: _____

Evaluation performed by: _____

Segment ID # _____

Size of Main: _____

Upstream MH# _____

Downstream MH# _____

Pipe Material: _____

Segment Length: _____

Current maintenance schedule of segment: _____

Task performed: Jet Root saw CCTV Smoke test Dye test Other _____

(If CCTV, please forward copy of inspection with this form)

History of main (date and description of any and all worked performed on this main that there are records for. (Attach copies of records to this form): _____

Gather the following information from resident/owner

Claimant Contacted: Yes No

Date & Time: _____

Did they remain in the residence: Yes No If no how long were they out? _____

Have they done any cleanup: Yes No

Are they using affected area Yes No

Has there been any property repairs Yes No

SANITARY SEWER REFERENCE & EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

MUNICIPALITY: _____

Department: _____

Primary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Secondary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Police:

Primary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Secondary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Fire:

Primary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Secondary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Specialty Contractor: _____

Primary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Secondary Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Claims Administrator: Oklahoma Municipal Assurance Group (OMAG)

Primary Contact: claims@omag.org

Phone: 1-800-234-9461

Local: 405 657-1400

A list of all emergency cleanup or pumping equipment, and where it is stored, is attached. I list of licensed plumbers should be available to assist residents.

Last Updated: _____

Sample Only

Dear Resident:

Sanitary sewers can back up into your home or on your property when a sanitary sewer pipe is blocked. These problems may occur in your private sewer line or in the public sewer main. City crews will evaluate the condition of the public sewer main at no cost to you. Your private sewer line (lateral line) will not be evaluated by the City.

In the unfortunate event of a sanitary sewer backs up into your home or on your property, please follow these steps:

- 1) **Contact Public Works.**
 - a. Between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday, contact Public Works Department at 555-1234.
 - b. During all other hours including holidays, Police Dispatch answers emergency calls at 555-4321.
- 2) **Public Works Supervisor will be dispatched to investigate the condition of the public sewer.**
 - a. If no blockage is found in the public sewer, the blockage is in the private sewer. The property owner is responsible for blockages in the private sewer.
 - b. If the blockage is in the public sewer, the supervisor will call for the resources needed to get the sewer line flowing.
- 3) **City Public Works Crew will clear any blockage discovered in the public sewer.**
 - a. Crews are authorized only to evaluate the condition of the public sewer and repair problems found in the public sewer.
- 4) **The homeowner must take steps to mitigate their damages.**
 - a. Crews are not authorized to spend public resources, such as equipment and labor, to pump out basements or help you with cleaning up your private property. Even if the back up resulted from problems in the public sewer, you are responsible for cleaning up and making necessary repairs.
- 5) **Claim Adjusters determine if you are eligible for reimbursement of costs.**
 - a. Document any damages in writing, by taking photos and by saving any receipts.
 - b. You may report any damages to your homeowners' insurance company. You may or may not be eligible for reimbursement of your costs from your homeowners insurance.
 - c. **If the blockage was in the public sewer main**, any damages may be reported to the City's Third Party Administrator. You may or may not be eligible for reimbursement of your costs from the City. To report the claim to the City, contact **Jane Doe**, City Clerk for the City of Yourtown, at 555-9876. The City Clerk will report your information to the City's Claim Administrator. The Claim Administrator will assign an adjuster who is responsible for determining whether your costs can be reimbursed.

Although the City performs routine and periodic maintenance, blockages can still occur. Most sewer blockages are the result of people putting grease, trash or other inappropriate materials down the sewer lines or in manholes. The City's insurance company cannot be held responsible for the damages which result from such inappropriate materials.

Supervisor Signature Date

Resident Signature Date

OKLAHOMA MUNICIPAL ASSURANCE GROUP
SEWER BACKUP QUESTIONNAIRE

CLAIMANT: _____
ADDRESS: _____
DATE OF LOSS: _____
CLAIM NUMBER: _____
LOCATION OF BACKUP: _____

Instructions: Please complete this questionnaire and attach or identify any supporting documentation. Use back if additional space is required for a response.

1. Are records available of the rainfall in the area preceding the subject sewer?
Yes No . If yes, specify the amount of rainfall for each time period to the backup:
24 hrs. , 48 hrs. , 72 hrs. .

2. Were you able to determine the cause of the sewer backup? Yes No
 (a) infiltration or inflow;
 (b) a foreign object, e.g., roots
 (c) sewer line or refuse introduced into the line; or
 (d) other cause

Please explain specifically what was found and identify any person(s) with personal knowledge of the findings.

3. Have there been previous blockages or backups in this line or within 300 feet of this address in the last 5 years preceding the subject backup? Yes No . If yes, specify:

(a) when? _____

(b) where on the line? _____

(c) what was determined to be the cause? _____

4. Have the claimants or other occupants at this address given any other notice to the municipality of a sewer backup problem in the past 5 years? Yes No . If yes, when and how was it documented?

5. Does the municipality have a regular maintenance program of cleaning, jetting, or rodding the sewer line that serves this address? Yes No . If yes, on what date(s) and in what manner was this done in the six months prior to this claim?

6. What is the size and age of the sewer line in which the backup occurred? Size _____, Age _____.

7. Is the sewer line sufficient for the current load? (e.g., if a 6" line was sufficient in 1940, is it sufficient today where greater number of homes or businesses may have been added to capacity of the line)? Yes No .
8. Did the claimant have a relief or check valve on his private line? Yes No . If yes, when was it installed?
9. Does the municipality have any ordinances, contracts, or regulations which may relate to the consideration of this claim? Yes No . If yes, attach a copy of the pertinent document.
10. If this backup was due to grease in the line, does the municipality have a grease trap ordinance? Yes No . If yes, how was it enforced?
11. Are there any other parties that have an interest in the subject property? Yes No . If yes, specify whether the person(s) is a landlord, property owner, spouse, business partner or other occupant.
12. Does the City maintain records, work orders or any other documents regarding the subject of sewer backup? Yes No . If so, please attach legible copies of all records.
13. Is the sewer system maintained and operated by some one other than the city? Yes No . If so, please provide copy of the contract with the third party contractor.
14. Had the line involved been jet rodded or cleaned in any other manner in the 72-hour period before the backup occurred? Yes No .
15. Please provide any additional information relevant to this claim.

Signed by

Position

Date

Phone Number

RETURN TO:

Oklahoma Municipal Assur. Group
3650 South Blvd.
Edmond, Ok 73013

Phone: (405) 657-1400

Fax: (405) 657-1401

SECTION 3: Public Information & Education

The following property owner information and educational flyers are offered for your use and/or customization, in developing a comprehensive sewer backup loss prevention program for your municipality.

Feel free to incorporate whatever forms may be useful to you, change them in any way that meets your needs, and add your own letterhead or logos.

HELP YOURSELF - HELP YOUR NEIGHBOR BASEMENT FLOODING PREVENTION Checklist

You can help prevent basement flooding with a few simple changes around your home. Every little bit helps to protect your home—and your neighbors' homes too.

- Slope ground away from your foundation to allow rain-water to flow away from your home.
- Seal your window wells, cracks in floors and walls to stop water from entering your home.
- Have Downspouts from your gutters direct water at least 6 feet from your home or into a rain barrel. Downspouts should never be connected to the sanitary sewer system or footing drains.
- Ensure your footing drains direct water to the storm sewer or sump pump, away from your foundation and are never connected to the sanitary sewer system.
- Ensure your sump pump is not connected to the sanitary sewer system and discharges water at least 6 feet from your home.
- Ensure lateral pipes between your home and the public sewer main are in good condition.
- Seal & tighten your cleanout caps and backwater valve caps.
- Install protective plumbing devices (like backwater valves) to protect you against sewer backups.

Facts About Sewer Backup Incidents Information For Homeowners & Residents

Sewer backups are an unfortunate, but common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal utility 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 sewers flow by gravity so they generally follow the natural slope of the ground. The sewer mains that the city owns and maintains are generally from eight to fifteen feet deep, with some being much deeper. Sanitary sewer backups can be caused by a number of factors. They usually involve sewer pipe blockages in either the city's main sewer lines or in the private sewer service line which the property owner owns and maintains (sewer line between buildings and the city's main sewer line). Causes of a backup may include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, system deterioration, or construction mishaps. For home and office plumbing systems, a frequent cause is accumulation of grease, tree roots, hair, or other solid materials, such as disposable diapers or sanitary napkins that are too large for wastewater pipes to handle. Another frequent cause of backups in residences is a ground water connection to the sanitary sewer system. Such instances may cause major backups in city lines as well as in residents' private service lines.

Another frequent cause of blockages within the city's system is vandalism. Leaves, sticks, rocks, bricks, and trash are sometimes found stuffed down manholes. We hope you will report observations of any such activity by calling 816-123-4567 to alert the sewer maintenance division and prevent an unfortunate backup from occurring.

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. 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.
- ❖ 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 sewer maintenance division immediately at 816-123-4567.
- ❖ Call a plumber if the problem is in your lateral service line.

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 immediately cleared.
- ❖ If the main line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumbing or sewer contractor to check your service line. Maintenance and repair of the service line is the owner's responsibility from the house to and including the connection to the city's main sewer. The main sewer is

owned and maintained by the City of your city.

- ❖ 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 you do not feel confident in your abilities.

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

- ❖ Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or household drain. It will solidify, collect debris and accumulate in city lines, or build up in your own sewer service line.
- ❖ 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). You can call the sewer maintenance division for assistance in locating where your service line connects to the city's sewer main. Your plumber may be able to help you further determine the location of your service line between your house and the city's sewer main.
- ❖ 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 the City of your city, a licensed plumber or plumbing supply dealer.

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.
- ❖ Degreasing chemicals are 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 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 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 full 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?

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 sewer maintenance division at 816-123-4567
Sewer Maintenance Division
123 South 1st Street
Yourtown, MO 64105

www.citywebsite.org
Cable Channel

QUESTIONS EVERY PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER ABOUT THEIR SANITARY SEWER SYSTEM

- **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SYSTEM:**
 - Do you have a map of all your sewer lines?
 - Do you know how many manholes are in your city?
 - Do you know where all those manholes are located?
 - Do you know how many miles of sewer line are in your City?
 - Do you know what the pipes are made of?
 - Do you know how old they lines are?
 - Do you know when they were installed?
 - Is there a plan in place to repair or replace certain sections of the lines?
 - Do you know what it cost to repair or replace a line?
 - Do you know the process of contracting with someone to replace the lines?
- **DEQ VIOLATIONS:**
 - Have you had DEQ violations?
 - Do you have a contact at the DEQ that you keep in contact with?
 - Can you explain the differences and consequences of DEQ violations?
 - Have you ever appealed a DEQ violation if you did not agree with the violation?
 - Do you follow up in writing with DEQ once an issue is resolved?
- **MAINTENANCE:**
 - Do you have a policy that requires routine maintenance?
 - Do you perform maintenance regularly?
 - What does that maintenance consist of?
 - Do you jet rod regularly?
 - Do you treat for grease?
 - Do you treat for roots?
 - Do you have a written maintenance protocol?
- **PAPERWORK:**

- How do you keep track of phone calls?
- How do you keep track of maintenance?
- Do you have a work order system?
- Do you document an interaction with a resident?
- How long do you keep the paperwork?
- Does the paperwork collect all work performed?
- Does the paperwork collect all employees working?
- Does the paperwork collect all the tools/products used for the project?
- **EQUIPMENT:**
 - Does your city have a jet-rodder?
 - Does your city have a camera?
 - Do you perform periodic smoke tests?
 - Are employees trained properly on how to use the equipment?
 - Do you have a plan to replace the equipment over time with newer equipment?
- **STAFF:**
 - Do you keep the City Manager or Mayor/Council apprised of the system and system needs?
 - Do you train your employees on a regular basis?
 - Do you train your employees on customer service?
 - Do you train your employees on the importance of accurate paperwork?
- **RESPONDING TO A CALL:**
 - Is there a protocol for responding?
 - Does someone meet with the homeowner(s) to discuss the problem or what is going to happen?
 - Do you trouble shoot when there's a blockage? Or just start jet rodding?
 - Do you follow up with residents when completed?
 - Do you give the residents some helpful information on who to contact and what to do if there is another problem?
 - Are you briefed on every back-up call?

- **REQUIREMENTS OF ORDINANCE:**
 - Are you proactive about pop-off valves?
 - Does your city require a back-flow device on all structures?
 - Do you inspect when a new line is put in that attaches to the main?
 - Do you require a certain material when new lines are attaching to the main?
 - Are restaurants required have grease traps?
- **CITY MANAGER/MAYOR AS A WITNESS:**
 - Do you get regular updates from regarding the sewer system?
 - Do you get notices when a resident has had a back-up?
 - Do you support a regular maintenance plan?
 - Do you set aside the appropriate money to make repairs?