



INFORMATION FOR HOMEOWNERS & RESIDENTS

– Facts about Sewer Backup Incidents –

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). In home and office plumbing systems, backups are often caused by grease, tree roots, hair, or solid materials, such as “flushable” wipes, 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. Floods and construction mishaps may also cause sewer backups.

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.
- The City has maintenance crews that are devoted to inspecting and cleaning wastewater lines throughout the City on a regular schedule.
- Even with a rigorous 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.

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, “flushable” wipes, 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 not been replaced, consider whether the roots of large shrubs or trees near the line could invade, constrict, or break pipes. It is a good idea to know the location and material type 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.

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 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.

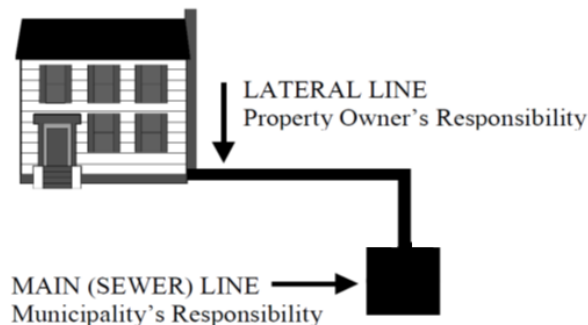
What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?

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.
- Do not 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 private lateral line, or widespread in your neighborhood. In this case, call the Water Department immediately. Numbers are listed at the end of this flyer.
- 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 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.



How and where should I report a sewer backup?

Staff are on call 24 hours a day. In an emergency such as a sewer line backup, please contact:

**New Richmond Water Department
(715) 246-4167**