

Facts About Sewer Backup Incidents

INFORMATION FOR HOMEOWNERS & RESIDENTS

What should I do if sewage is backing up into my home?

First, take action to protect people and valuable property:

- Keep 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 or rag can be used to help plug toilet openings.
- Don't run any water down your drains until the blockage has been cleared.
- Avoid skin contact with sewer water – especially open cuts and sores.
- Wash hands frequently following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects and surfaces.
- To reduce the danger of electrocution, do not enter your basement if it is flooded.
- Turn off your HVAC system.
- If the water backs up in your drain ONLY WHEN YOU USE WATER, then you most likely need to call a plumber.
- If water is coming out of your drain and you are not using water, call PeopleService's **toll-free emergency number at 1-888-861-1921** immediately.
- Take before and after photos of the affected area.
- Call an experienced restoration company for cleanup and removal of affected surfaces.
- Report a claim to your homeowner's insurance carrier.

For a fee, any local water/fire restoration company can assist in the cleanup – so give them a call. If you cannot find a local restoration company, listed below are a couple national companies that may provide service in your area:

STEAMATIC
1-888-STEAMATIC
steamatic.com

SERVICEPRO
1-800-SERVPRO
servpro.com

If you decide to clean up the affected area yourself, keep in mind these helpful tips:

- Discard any contaminated objects that cannot be washed or laundered.
- The humidity in the damaged area should be lowered by opening up the house and removing standing wastewater with a mop, wet vac or squeegee. Interior closets and cabinet doors should be opened to allow air circulation.
- Fans, dehumidifiers and window air conditioners can be used to circulate the air, but whole house air conditioners or furnace blowers should be used only if the air ducts were not impacted by standing wastewater.
- Wash contaminated surfaces and objects with warm – not hot – soapy water and disinfect with a bleach and water solution made of no more than one cup bleach per one gallon of water. For items that would be damaged by bleach, use a home or laundry disinfectant.
- Scrub and wash all objects in the affected area of your home, including exposed clothing. Again, use warm – not hot – water.

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Sewer backups are unfortunate, but are a common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal utility departments make every effort to prevent such incidents, they still occur. The following information is offered to help property owners and residents understand why backups happen and how they can be prevented.

What causes a sewer backup?

Sanitary sewers flow by gravity so they generally follow the natural slope of the ground. The sewer main lines 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 line which the property owner owns and maintains. These are the sewer lines between buildings and the city's main sewer lines. Causes of a backup may include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, system deterioration, insufficient system capacity due to residential or commercial growth, construction mishaps, heavy rains and electrical failure. In 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. Such materials may cause major backups in city lines as well as 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 City Hall to prevent an unfortunate backup from occurring.

How can I prevent a sewer backup?

- Dispose of grease and fats with your trash. Do not put it down the drain!
- Never flush disposable diapers, sanitary napkins or paper towels.
- Check your trees. Roots from trees could be blocking the sewer lines that come to your house.
- Consider installing a "back-flow valve" on the lowest drain.
- For further information about preventative measures, contact a licensed plumber.

Will insurance cover any damages 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, your city and PeopleService cannot assume full financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups since most stoppages are related to conditions that are beyond our control. That is why it is important that property owners confirm that they are adequately insured – particularly if areas of your home lie below ground level.

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

**99% of sewage is water from the kitchen, laundry and shower.
Only 1% comes from.....other stuff!**

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