

Preventing a Sewer Backup Before it Happens

What can I do to prevent a sanitary sewer backup in my home/business or on main lines?

Here are some very important rules to follow to help keep lines flowing in the correct direction:

1. NEVER pour grease down drains or into garbage disposals. Grease will turn into a hard solid that blocks lines and can result in sewer backup. Let grease cool down and dispose in trash. This also applies to large amounts of paint which will build up over a period of time and eventually cause a blockage.
2. Putting food down a garbage disposal in your kitchen sink can be a convenient method of throwing away leftovers. However, some foods, such as certain vegetables and vegetable skins, have natural oils in them. These food particles can convert into grease in your pipes and sewer service line.
3. Roots from trees can grow into sewer line joints and obstruct flow. If there are several mature trees and bushes in your yard located near or around where your service lines runs, you may want to periodically have the sanitary sewer service line checked and/or cleaned out by a plumber, especially if your toilets, sinks, etc. are experiencing frequent blockages or backups.
4. BE ON THE LOOKOUT! If you see an overflowing manhole, detect a sewer odor or observe evidence of sewer on the ground or in a stream, please report this by calling 641-357-6135 during normal business hours or 641-357-2186 after hours.
5. Consider the installation of backup prevention devices, which may be installed by your qualified plumber.

Homeowner Responsibilities

Sewer backups are most commonly a private problem and the responsibility of the homeowner. There are many reasons for backups, which the City cannot control. For example, people dumping inappropriate things such as grease or diapers into the system can create a blockage. Tree roots can grow into and obstruct the lines.

Generally, the City is responsible only if it was negligent in maintaining the City's sewer lines. Sometimes, your homeowner's insurance will pay for sewer backup. Not all policies have this coverage and it must be purchased additionally, so check with your insurance agent.

If you smell sewer gas, check to see if all sewer traps are filled with water and check to see if the cap on the sewer cleanout is on tight. If gas smell persists, call your plumber and have your system checked.



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CITY OF CLEAR LAKE

***WHAT YOU
NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT...***

***SANITARY
SEWER SERVICE***



- Reporting a Service Problem
- Preventative Maintenance Measures
- Responsibilities of Property Owner & City

Overview

The City of Clear Lake Public Works Department manages an extensive sanitary sewer collection system serving more than 3,700 customers in the incorporated city limits. The system consists of more than 48 miles of gravity sewer main lines.

Clear Lake ensures reliable sewer service by providing a well-maintained system through routine maintenance, testing and rehabilitation of our main lines. These maintenance measures help prevent obstructive build up that may cause service problems for our customers. However, due to a variety of factors beyond the City's control, backups may occur in City main lines or in the customer's service line.

The following information will help sanitary sewer customers understand why backups occur, provide tips to help prevent sewer backups on your property, and explain the service responsibilities of both the property owner and the City when it comes to sewer maintenance.

What is the difference between "sanitary sewer" and "storm water sewer" lines?

A sanitary sewer pipe is located mainly in the street or another easement (side or rear property line) that is designed to transport wastewater from sanitary fixtures inside your house or place of business to the wastewater treatment plant. Sanitary fixtures include sinks, bathtubs, showers, and washing machines. Also, your basement floor drain.

A storm sewer pipe is designed to carry rainwater away. Storm sewer lines are normally much larger because they are designed to carry large amounts of water.

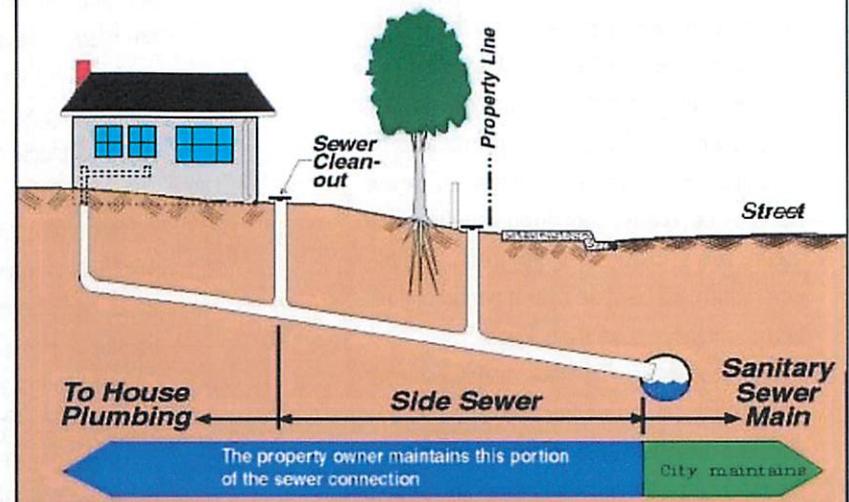
Homeowner or City Responsibilities

What part of the sewer system serving my property is my responsibility to maintain? What is the City's responsibility?

The City is responsible for maintaining its main sewer lines (the portion with no connections).

Private property owners are responsible for the sewer service line (including the "tap" connection or "wye"). This line starts at the tap on the sewer main, extends across the customer's property and connects at the home or business.

Typical House Sewer Connection



City Preventative Measures

What preventative maintenance measures does the City take to keep sewer lines flowing properly?

The City's Public Works Dept. uses the following methods to maintain sanitary sewer main lines:

1. Trouble areas, neighborhoods served by typically older sewer mains blocked by tree roots, are kept on a routine maintenance schedule.
2. Sewer main lines are cleaned out routinely or as trouble calls are reported.
3. The City can conduct sewer smoke or dye tests to identify main line or service line cracks that can cause leaks.
4. The City can run a small camera down the sewer pipe to identify main line cracks or deterioration.
5. Based on any testing that is conducted, the City will prioritize replacement and/or rehabilitation of sewer mains.

What to do When a Sewer Backup Occurs

What should I do if a sewer backup occurs at my home or business?

Occasionally, a blockage in a sewer main or sewer service results in back up of sanitary sewage into a private home or business. The following information should provide you with a starting point...

CALL US FIRST!

Immediately contact our Public Works Department. Normal business hours: 641-357-6135 or after hours, call 641-357-2186.

Even if you suspect the problem may be in your service line, it's best to call the City first before you call a plumber. Our service crew will check the City's main lines to either identify and repair any potential problem or to determine whether or not you need to call a plumber.