



City of Warrenton

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[www.warrenton-mo.org](http://www.warrenton-mo.org)

## **Sewer Backup Incidents**

### Information for Homeowners and Residents

Sewer Backups are an unfortunate, but common problem in U.S. Cities and towns. Although the Public Works Department makes every effort to prevent such incidents, they may still 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 information 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 main that the City owns and maintains are generally from eight to fifteen 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 easement). Causes of a backup may include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, system deterioration, or construction mishaps. 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. 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 us at 636-456-3535 to 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. Call a plumber if the problem is in your plumbing.

#### **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 blockages will be cleared immediately.
- If the City line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumbing or sewer contractor to check your plumbing. Maintenance and repair of the service line is the owner's responsibility from the house to the City's easement as long as there is a clean out on the City's side. The main sewer is owned and maintained by the City of Warrenton.

- 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 holder 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 Public Works 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 preventative measures, contact the City of Warrenton about a licensed plumber or plumbing supply dealer in the area

### **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.
- However, even with our maintenance schedule 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 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.

### **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 Public Works Department at 636-456-3535 Monday through Friday between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. After hours, contact Warren County Emergency Services at 636-456-7088.