# Sewer Backups: Information and Advice

## General Information

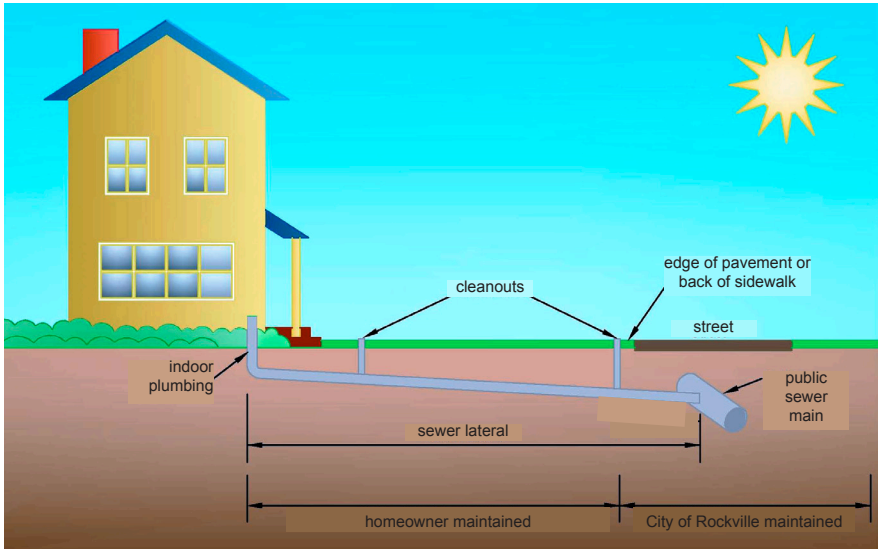
A sewer backup creates a stressful and emotional situation for the homeowner/renter. In some cases it may cause safety concerns as well as significant property loss. A proper response to a sewer backup can greatly minimize property damage and diminish the threat of illness.

The City of Rockville makes every effort to be responsive to a residents' needs and concerns when a sewer backup occurs. The City of Rockville has a crew whose sole duty is to inspect, clean and maintain sewers on a daily basis. Unfortunately, because a sewer is not a closed system, many things put into the sewer can clog the system. While the City has adopted rules prohibiting the discharge of any substance likely to cause a sewer obstruction, and can try to educate the public about the problems they cause, there is really no way we can absolutely prevent this from happening.

## What To Do If I've had a Sewer Backup

If you experience a sewer problem within the City of Rockville service area, please call 240-314-8567 and state that you are reporting a sewer emergency. Backed up sewer lines, line breaks, sewage odors and overflowing manholes are considered an emergency.

If the problem is in the sewer lateral, the homeowner or business is to correct the problem as the owner of the property is responsible for maintaining and cleaning the sewer lateral from the building (or home) to the cleanout.




Remember to call the city first - before calling a plumber. We will check the sewer main and inform you of our findings. If the problem is not in the main line sewer, you will be advised to contact a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service.

Please be aware that City crews are only responsible for clearing a blockage on the City side of the lateral and are not authorized to enter your home or business to clear a blockage from inside of the property, nor are they trained in cleanup or able to help in the removal of personal belongings.

## Insurance and Claims for Property Damage

The City may not pay for damages caused by sewer back ups unless they are caused by a direct act or negligence of the City. This rarely occurs.

During the 2008 legislative session, Maryland's General Assembly passed a law requiring homeowner insurers to offer coverage for losses caused by water and sewer backups as local governments are not typically liable for these losses.

Securing this insurance on your own is essential to protect against a sewage backup and any related damage.

In the event of a sewer backup, the homeowner's insurance company will be responsible and respond to this type of an event and arrange for the majority of any clean-up.

The City of Rockville, however is one of the few jurisdictions to offer a "good-will" policy for no-fault sewer backups. This policy allows for limited and discretionary payments towards cleaning and sanitizing damaged property or towards payment of your insurance deductible. This good-will policy will only apply if City crews detemine that the blockage was in a City maintained portion of the sewer line,

The good-will payment may only serve as reimbursement of interior cleaning expenses and/or deductible payments. Any good-will payment will be subject to review by the City and its insurer.

You are still advised to utilize your homeowner's coverage to assure a more thorough clean-up of any damaged areas and absent coverage, you will be responsible for any payments that exceed the City's good-will policy.

## Cleaning Advice

As the resident or owner has the responsibility to minimize damage, the following general cleaning tips may be of use (this does not replace the need for professional remediation):

*Assure that there is no risk of electrical shock before entering the wet areas.*

*Completely dewater the area and empty water into the toilet or sink. DO NOT dump the water outside.*

*Furniture, floor coverings and other debris should be disposed of via the City of Rockville's Bulk Trash Pickup.*

*Disinfect the floor and wall surfaces with 1/4 cup of bleach to each 1 gallon of water.*

*Ventilate and air-dry flooded areas after disinfection.*

*Exercise safety measures while cleaning the flooded areas and wear personal protective gear that fits the exposures (rubber boots and waterproof gloves).*

# Preventing Sewer Backups

Did you know that discharging your fats, oils and grease into your home sewer and water lines can result in sewer backups? The discharge of fats, oils and grease (FOGs) into the City of Rockville's sanitary sewer system and storm drains is a rapidly increasing problem that results in the unnecessary spending of thousands of tax dollars each year to remove blockages and repair sanitary sewers.

When FOGs are deposited down the drain they cool and solidify to form hard deposits that decrease sewer line capacity and cause blockages and breaks. This can result in raw sewage overfowing from manholes and backing up into homes.

In an effort to address this problem, the City has adopted the Water Quality Protection Ordinance, which precludes residents from pouring cooking fats, oils and grease down their drains. (To view the full ordinance please visit www.rockvillemd.gov/environment/regulations).

General Disposal Guidelines:

Grease: Cooking oil should be poured into a heat-resistant container and disposed of, after it cools off, in the garbage, not the drain. Some people assume that washing grease down the drain with hot water is satisfactory. This grease goes down the drain, cools off, and solidifies either in the drain, the property owner's line or in the main sewer. When this happens, the line constricts, and eventually clogs.

Paper Products: Paper towels, disposable (and cloth) diapers, and feminine products cause a great deal of problems in the property owner's lateral as well as in the City main. These products do not deteriorate quickly, as does bathroom tissue. They be-

come lodged in portions of the lateral/main, causing sewer backup. These products should be disposed of in the garbage.

City of Rockville Public Works Prevention Programs: 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, 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.

Sewer backups are an unfortunate but common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal departments make every effort to prevent such incidents, they still may occur.

The following information is offered to help City of Rockville residents understand why backups happen, how they can be prevented, and what steps citizens should take if a sewer backup affects their property.

**Department of Public Works**
**and**
**Safety and Risk Management**

ATTACH A

# Sewer Backups

## A Guide for City of Rockville Customers

City of Rockville
Get Into It