

What to do during a sewer backup

1 IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

If sewage is flowing out of floor drains, toilets, sinks, etc., place rags in or over the backup to stop or reduce the flow; secure the rags in place with a sandbag, kitty litter, etc. Wash hands and all body parts with soap and water that come into contact with sewage.

2 CONTACT THE CITY

503-618-2626 Weekdays

503-661-3906 Evenings, weekends and holidays

City work crew will immediately respond to the scene and evaluate the situation. The crew will take the steps necessary to identify and eliminate the cause of the sewer backup in the public system and provide preliminary cleanup.

3 EVACUATE ALL PEOPLE AND PETS

Any contact with untreated sewage can be potentially harmful to humans and pets.

KEEP IT OUT!

WIPES CLOG PIPES

Those “disposable” wipes may be labeled flushable, but they often don’t dissolve or break down after being flushed, and clog the sewer system. If it doesn’t dissolve as fast as toilet paper, it’s not flushable.



4 CALL YOUR HOMEOWNER'S INSURANCE AGENT

Contact your insurance agent to determine if your losses may be covered by your policy.

5 ARRANGE FOR CLEANUP

The City will respond and provide initial cleanup of sewage outside of the home or building that poses a threat to public health.

Sewage cleanup within homes and buildings may be completed by one of the City’s service providers, unless the cause of the backup is clearly the responsibility of the private property owner.

6 ASSESS DAMAGE

Itemize and document damage to property, structures and belongings.

7 LEARN MORE

Visit GreshamOregon.gov/Wastewater for information about the City’s Water Resources Division and the quality of our water.

CITY OF GRESHAM

Department of Environmental Services
Water Resources Division
503-618-2525



SEWER
BACKUP?

FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS

CITY OF GRESHAM

Sewer backup facts

Sewer backups onto private property can create health hazards and cause significant damage to property, buildings and contents.

WHAT ARE THE CITY'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

The City is responsible for immediately responding to all sewer backups in order to investigate and determine the cause of the situation, provide information to customers regarding clean up costs, and provide initial, preliminary clean up in order to protect public health. If the situation occurred in the public system, the City will hire a service provider to complete the clean up.

WHAT ARE THE CUSTOMER'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

Gresham wastewater customers are responsible for backups caused in their private sewer lines, and for the installation, maintenance and inspection of backwater valves that are required on some private lines.

The Oregon Plumbing Code requires all properties with plumbing or drains that are lower than the nearest upstream sewer manhole cover to install a backwater valve to prevent sewage from backing up into the building structure or onto private property.

Customers are also responsible for maintaining an insurance policy to cover damage by sewer backups from the private system.

WHAT IS A BACKWATER VALVE?

A backwater valve is a mechanical device attached to the sewer discharge pipe to prevent sewage from flowing backwards into the building or onto the property.

WHAT CAUSES A SEWER BACKUP?

Sewer backups can be caused by the following:

- Pipe failures
- Blockages (from grease, rocks, sticks, toys, etc.)
- Excessive flows that exceed system capacity (typically due to significant rainfall)
- Damage by contractors
- Power or mechanical failures at sewer pump stations
- Settlement or movement of the soil adjacent to the pipe

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY PROPERTY FROM SEWER BACKUPS?

- Never pour food greases down sink drains or into toilets because it can harden and cause blockages in sewer pipes over time. Scrape grease into a can to cool before disposing in the trash.
- Do not use the toilet to dispose of garbage or wipes.
- Install and maintain a backwater valve if needed. If your property's lowest drain elevation in your home or building is below the rim (typically the street) elevation of the nearest "upstream" sewer manhole cover, your property may be at risk of a backup. The installation of a backwater valve is recommended. Contact the City's Building Permit Desk at 503-618-2845 for information regarding installation.
- Ask your insurance agent if your homeowner's or rental insurance policy covers sewer backups.

IS MY HEALTH OR MY FAMILY'S HEALTH AT RISK?

Physical contact with untreated sewer always carries a potential health risk. People and pets should be evacuated from any contaminated home or building as soon as possible.

WHO WILL PAY FOR THE CLEANUP?

The City will respond in all cases to citizens' calls, assess the situation, and provide initial cleanup of any sewer backup that poses a threat to public health.

Unless it is 100% certain the sewer backup occurred in the private line, the City will pay for a preliminary cleanup. A private service provider, under contract with the City, will perform this cleanup. This service is at no charge to the owner or tenant but does not include restoration and repair to damaged property. The owner or tenant must sign an "Authorization for Preliminary Cleanup of Sewer Backup" prior to cleaning. It is important to note that the City paying for preliminary cleanup does not establish liability on the part of the City but simply ensures public safety.

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