

CITIZEN INSTRUCTIONS FOR SEWER BACKUP EVENTS

1/12/20

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A SEWER BACKUP

It is never pleasant to deal with a sewer backup. However, a prompt and proper response will go a long way toward minimizing property damage and potentially negative health effects. If a backup does happen, the following information can help protect you and your family from the hazards of raw sewage in your home.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Sewage contains bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other hazardous micro-organisms which can cause disease. Health risks depend on the amount of sewage, the types of germs present, the amount of time it has been in contact with materials in the home, and how much and how long one has been exposed. These “germs” can be transmitted by touching contaminated items or by tracking them into uncontaminated areas on shoes or feet. Children and pets are especially vulnerable. Sewage odor is unpleasant but not harmful. Generally, the more solids (i.e. human waste) present in the water, the greater the need for prompt and proper cleanup of materials that come into contact with it. The most common illnesses one might acquire are generally gastrointestinal distress and/or skin rashes/infections. If you experience any nausea, diarrhea or vomiting after exposure to sewage, promptly contact your doctor.

DO THESE THINGS RIGHT AWAY

1. Stay out of areas flooded with sewage.
2. Evacuate if necessary; especially if the backup cannot be isolated. Sewage exposure is particularly dangerous to anyone very young or elderly, anyone suffering from respiratory ailments or weakened immune systems, pregnant or ill.
3. Turn the power off if there is standing water or the possibility of electrical wires/appliances coming into contact with water or soggy materials.
4. Do not flush toilets or use sinks, showers, dishwashers or laundry machines.
5. Notify the appropriate party:
 - a. If the obstruction in the sewer line occurs in the **main line**, call the Public Works Department (360) 293-1921 or After Hours Emergency Number 911.
 - b. If the obstruction in the sewer line occurs in the **lateral line, or if unsure** where the obstruction is located, call Public Works to check the main line, then call a sewer contractor to alleviate the obstruction. Call your homeowner’s insurance provider to inquire if it has clean-up companies on contract who know how to deal with property damage from sewer backups. Call a professional water damage restoration company if your insurance company does not have one.
6. Avoid direct contact with sewage and sewage contaminated items, if possible. Wear rubber gloves and boots when in the vicinity of the backup. Wash hands immediately after handling any contaminated items.

7. Avoid skin contact with sewer water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered. If you should suffer a cut while working in sewer water, **contact your physician** about receiving a tetanus shot.
8. Keep contaminated objects, water and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes and nose).
9. Turn off force air furnaces and air conditioners if the ductwork has sewer water in it.
10. Be careful not to track contamination into other parts of the residence.
11. Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.
12. Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating, and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.

CLEANING UP AFTER A SEWER BACKUP

Start the clean up as soon as possible to minimize any potential health risks. If the backup is confined to a small area (i.e. bathroom), the cleanup may be performed by the homeowner. Larger backups, however, should be cleaned by a professional cleaning service. You may contact your homeowner's insurance provider for the name of the professional cleaning service they use. Professional cleaning services can also be found in the phone book/internet.

If you choose to clean up the backup yourself, you should:

1. Dry the space out
 - a. All standing water needs to be removed. A sump pump, wet vac, or bucket may be used. Operate wet vacs only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.
 - b. All solid waste must be collected and discarded.
 - c. Use dehumidifiers, fans, window air conditioners and open windows to aid in the drying process when available. Whole house air conditioners or furnace blowers should be used only if sewage water did not get into the air ducts.
 - d. Remove vinyl covered wallpaper in affected areas, as it slows the drying process.
2. Sort, Discard and Disinfect
 - a. Move any contaminated property away from the affected areas.
 - b. Sort through contents to determine which can be salvaged and which must be discarded. Be sure to discard all contaminated:
 - i. Cardboard
 - ii. Carpets & carpet pads
 - iii. Cosmetics
 - iv. Food
 - v. Mattresses & pillows
 - vi. Medicines & medical supplies
 - vii. Stuffed animals & toys
 - viii. Unfinished furniture
 - ix. Upholstered furniture
 - x. Clothing may be salvageable if it can be adequately laundered. Consult with a professional water damage restorer or cleaning professional for specifics.

- xi. Anything else that is difficult to clean.
- c. Treat all water soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as contaminated until properly cleaned and sanitized.
- d. If you can see a water line or stain on wallboard or paneling from the sewage backup, the material should be cut out up to several inches above the water line and replaced. All of the areas contacted by water must be removed and disposed of within 24 hours. Once these items get wet, they retain moisture long enough to grow mold. Removing the wallboard allows air to circulate around the wood studs so that they dry completely and will not need to be replaced.
- e. Wash the contaminated surfaces, such as plumbing fixtures and vinyl, metal, wood and concrete surfaces with detergent solution to remove surface dirt and contamination. Don't skip this step, or the disinfection will be ineffective! Allow it to air dry.
- f. Apply a disinfectant labeled as being bactericidal (kills bacteria) or a solution of 1 part bleach + 10 parts water. Disinfectants and/or bleach should remain in contact with the items for 15-20 minutes to be effective. Allow it to air dry. **Warning:** Bleach solutions may cause discoloration of many materials.
- g. Disinfect all mops, sponges and brushes. Launder clothes worn during cleaning separately from other laundry.
- h. Clean appliances and/or ductwork. If electric motors, wiring or insulation have been saturated, have a qualified service technician remove the motor, dry it, and inspect for damage before plugging it back in and turning it on.
- i. Inspect all affected appliances before operating them again.

RECORDKEEPING

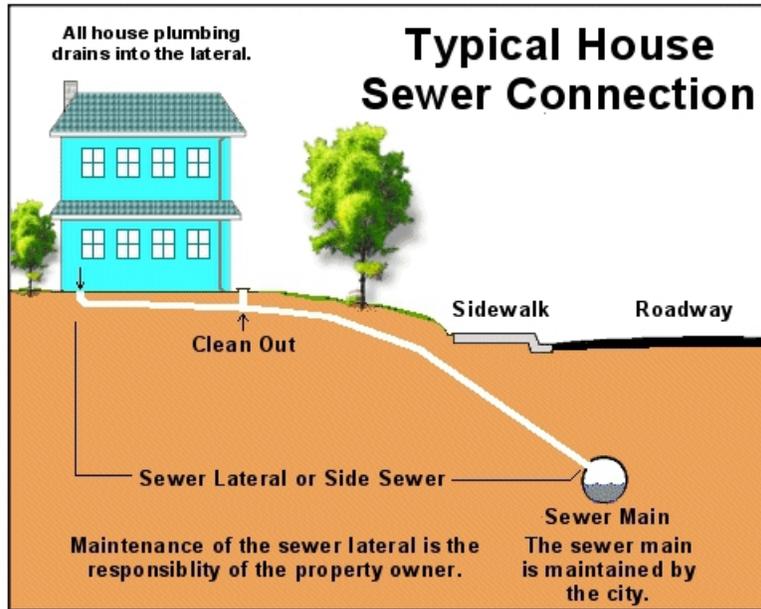
1. Take several photos before and after the cleanup. Take photos even if you have also taken video.
2. Take photos of anything that is going to be thrown away.
3. Create a list of all damaged items, including those that need to be thrown away.
4. Keep receipts for all cleaning materials you purchase, any items you had to immediately replace, and/or for any services provided by contractors.
5. Do not throw away anything without checking with your claims adjuster first. Some things you think may be unsalvageable, can be cleaned and sanitized and may not be covered if you discard it.

WHO PAYS FOR THE DAMAGE?

When the Public Works Department responds to a call by a property owner about a sewer backup, it is to investigate what has been reported to them. Please be advised that the presence of City staff on an affected property for a sewer backup investigation is not an admission of liability. Property owners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of all lateral lines (see the attached drawing identifying the sewer lateral or side sewer as the line extends from the City sewer mainline). If an obstruction occurs on the property owner's portion of the line, the property owner is responsible for all resulting damage.

The City is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the main line. Although the City has a preventative maintenance program, sections of the line may become obstructed. If an obstruction occurs in the City's main line, the City may be responsible if it is negligent in maintaining the main system lines. It is unlikely the City will be responsible for sewer backups caused by heavy rains, heavy snow melts, vandalism, or individuals dumping illegal or inappropriate materials into the system.

Call your homeowner's insurance agent as soon as possible. Some homeowner's policies provide coverage for sewer backups, others do not. If sewer backups are not covered, ask your agent for more information on adding this coverage to your homeowner's policy.



FILING A CLAIM

If you wish to file a claim with the City for damages caused by a sewer backup, please complete a "Claim for Damages Form," available from the Legal Department located at 904 6th Street or by phone at (360) 293-1912.

Once a completed claim form is received, the City and/or the insurance adjuster will conduct an investigation. A decision will be made when all of the information has been reviewed. You will be advised as quickly as possible. Please be aware that submittal of a claim for damages does not guarantee payment by the City of Anacortes or its insurance carrier. Please do not delay cleanup of the sewer backup while awaiting a decision on the claim. Delay often results in more damage occurring. Remember to take lots of pictures and track all of your expenses. If it is determined that the City has some responsibility for your damages, the amount of claim payment is based on the degree of City liability (if any) and the depreciated value (not replacement value) of the damaged property.

AFTER HOURS EMERGENCY NUMBER - 911