

# CITY OF SACO

## POLICY ON SEWER AND STORMWATER BACK-UPS

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to explain how and why sewer or stormwater backups occur, what to do in the event a homeowner has a backup, and to define the City's and homeowner's responsibilities.

This policy will generally explain the following in regards to the City sewerage collection systems:

- How it is designed,
- How it functions,
- What causes sewerage backups,
- What are the homeowners and the City's responsibilities,
- What to do in the event of a backup,
- Who is fiscally responsible, and
- How to protect you and your property.

### WHAT COMPRISES THE CITY'S COLLECTION SYSTEM AND HOW DOES IT FUNCTION?

The City of Saco has 65 miles of sanitary lines and 30 pump stations that transport about 2.5 million gallons of sewerage per day. During high flow periods, ground and surface waters entering the system through illicit or leaky connections can increase that flow to well over 10 million gallons per day. Many of the lines in the older parts of the City are combined lines that convey both storm and sewerage. In extreme weather, these lines can be overwhelmed by surface inflow and groundwater from illicit connections and leaking pipes and surcharge the system increasing the possibility of a backup.

The sewerage collection is accomplished in the following ways:

1. Sewerage exits the home through the internal plumbing into a house connection.
2. A house connection is the pipe usually 4 - 6 inches in diameter that conveys the sewerage from the home to the City's main. The house connection is owned by the homeowner and is their responsibility to maintain. The City in 2007, adopted a policy to repair or replace failed lines within the City right of way as adopted in the city Code Section ([See §176-30.1](#))
3. The City's mains are usually a minimum of 8 inches in diameter for a residential street and have manholes for servicing the lines approximately every 300 feet. The lines increase in size to a maximum of 72 inches as they get closer to the City's Wastewater Treatment Facility on Front Street.
4. Where gravity flow is not possible, the City has pumping stations that deliver sewerage from low points to a point where they can flow by gravity to the sewerage treatment facility.

## WHAT CAUSES A SEWER BACKUP?

Occasionally, there is a blockage or failure that causes the system to backup in the collection system and potentially into the homeowner's residence or business. Sewerage backups in a home usually occur in a basement or cellar through plumbing fixtures such as washers, sinks, showers, or toilets installed below ground level.

Backup can occur in the following ways:

- Mechanical failure or loss of power at a pumping station
- Structural failure of a house connection or main
- Blockage from sediment, grease, paper, diapers, and debris, and root intrusion
- Illicit connections such as sump pumps, foundations drains, and roof drains that overwhelm the system in wet weather conditions.
- Extreme surface water intrusion from flooding

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IF YOU HAVE A BACKUP OR IF YOUR FIXTURES ARE DRAINING SLOWLY

Unfortunately, despite a well maintained collection system, every system eventually fails or malfunctions resulting in backup. If you or your neighbors are having problems with the system functioning abnormally, such as slowly draining fixtures or not draining at all, it is important that you contact the Department of Public Works immediately at 282-6641 or after hours at the Public Safety Dispatch Center at 282-4535. Staff is on-call 7 days a weeks, 24 hours a day, and will be dispatched as soon possible.

## WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CITY?

The City is responsible for the maintaining the sewer and stormwater mains, manholes, and pumping stations.

In the event of a backup, the City will dispatch crews to inspect the sewer system and determine if the problem is within the City main or the house connection. If the problem is a blockage in the City main the crews will flush and clean the line immediately to alleviate the problem. Crews will also be dispatched to repair any issues with a mechanical failure in a pumping station.

If the problem is with the house connection, the City will advise the homeowner on how to contact contractors to fix the problem. While the staff would not suggest a specific contractor, they will advise you on where to look in the telephone directory or yellow pages and tell you what kind of contractor you may need to contact. City personnel will not enter a home to clear blockages in a house connection.

While the City does not own the house connection, as a service provided to the homeowner, the City will make repair or replace a house connection that has failed within the City right of way per policy, see ([See §176-30.1](#)). It is the responsibility of the homeowner to make that determination. Failure in this instance means it is disconnected, crushed, or collapsed within the City Right of Way and is not the result of negligent acts on the part of the homeowner. The City will make arrangements to repair the line as soon as practical at no cost to the homeowner.

The City is not responsible for housing costs, clean up, or property damage while the repairs are made to your line.

## WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HOMEOWNER?

The homeowner is responsible for the house connection (the pipe connecting the home and the City main) from their home to the City main. The homeowner owns this line and it is the homeowner that is responsible for maintaining it from the house to the City main. ([See §176-25.](#)) If a house connection fails within the City Right of Way, the City will repair it for the homeowner, but is not responsible for any failure of this line or any backup that occurs as a result of that failure. Additionally, the City has no way of knowing the condition or functionality of your house connection.

In the event of a backup, the homeowner will contact the City and a crew will be dispatched and check if the problem exists with the house connection or the City main line. If the main is found to be clear, the homeowner will be responsible for calling a plumber or drain cleaning service to correct the problem.

Plumbing fixtures including sump pumps, floor drains, toilets, showers, sinks, and washers below grade in a cellar or basement should have proper backflow prevention devices or controls to prevent sewage from entering the home.

Typically, homeowners insurance does not cover damage or clean up from sewerage or stormwater backup and will require that a rider be added to the homeowner policy to cover property damage and cleanup. If you are concerned about the possibility of a sewer back, you should contact your homeowners insurance regarding obtaining coverage for sewer backups.

## HOW TO CLEAN UP AFTER A BACKUP

A sewerage backup can be a health and safety hazard concern, destroy personal property, and damage your home and electrical systems. The owner should take immediate steps to minimize the inconvenience and damage.

You should immediately arrange for the clean up of your property

- Turn off electrical power to the effected area
- Take photographs of the damage
- Wet-Vacuum and remove spillage
- Mop the floors and wipe walls with soap and disinfectant
- Flush out and disinfect plumbing fixtures
- Steam clean or remove carpets and upholstery
- Repair damaged wallboard, flooring, and insulation
- Clean and disinfect appliances and ductwork

## WHO PAYS FOR THE DAMAGE AND CLEAN UP?

Sewer and or stormwater backups can result in significant costs for clean up and repairs. Property owners should include a rider on their homeowners insurance to cover possible damages and clean up. The City's insurance will only pay for damages that can be proved to be caused by negligence on the part of the City as determined by the City's insurance company.

## HOW CAN THE HOMEOWNER PROTECT THEIR PROPERTY FROM SEWER OR STORMWATER BACKUPS?

Homeowners can do a number of things to prevent sewer backups. Making sure that unprotected or illegal connections are eliminated is the first defense. Additionally, the homeowner can be knowledgeable about materials that cause both the house connections and the City mains to malfunction. Preventing these things from entering the system and installing backflow prevention devices will resolve most of the sewer backup issues.

- Backflow prevention: Sewer backups typically occur in buildings where the finish floors lower of at street grade. All homeowners that have buildings under these conditions

should have a licensed plumber determine if a backflow prevention device is required by the State Plumbing Code ([See 32 §3403-B. PLUMBING CODE](#)). It is possible that older homes built prior to the Plumbing Code being established may not have such a device. It is the property owner's responsibility to determine if a device is needed and to install the backflow preventer. Should a sewer backup occur within a building where a backflow device is required, and was not installed, the City will not be responsible for any damage or harm resulting from the backup. The backflow device, properly installed and maintained will prevent the sewerage from backing up into the home. The installation and maintenance of the backflow preventer is the responsibility of the homeowner.

- 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 drain line constricts and may eventually clog.
- 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 as quickly as bathroom tissue. They may become lodged in portions of the lateral/main, causing sewer backups. These products should be disposed of in the garbage.
- Roots and pipe joints: Over the years, sewer pipes have been made from various materials such as Orangeburg, vitrified clay tile or PVC (polyvinyl chloride). Orangeburg and clay tile are brittle and more prone to intrusion from roots at their joints. PVC pipe is made from long lasting, durable plastic material that uses water tight seals at every joint and is more resistant to root intrusion. Shrubs and trees, seeking moisture, will make their way into sewer line cracks and pipe joints. These roots can cause extensive damage. They may start out small, getting into a small crack in the pipe; but as the tree or shrub continues to grow, so does the root. After time, this causes your sewer line to break, which in turn allows debris to hang up in the line, thus causing a backup. One way to prevent roots from entering your line is to replace your line and tap with new plastic (PVC) pipe. The other alternative is to be careful about planting greenery around

your sewer line. If you have continuing problems with tree roots in your lateral, you may have to have them cut periodically.

- Sewer Odor: Another concern that property owners have is that they can smell sewer odors inside their house or building. There are many ways to prevent this from occurring. Under each sink or drain in your plumbing system is a “P-trap”. If there is water in this trap, odors or gasses from the sewer cannot enter through the drain from either of the property owners’ lateral or the City main. Periodically check to make sure that unused floor drains, sinks, etc. have water in the “P-Trap”. Another way to prevent sewer odor is to ensure that the vents, which are located on your roof, are free from bird’s nests, leaves, etc. When these vents are clear, the sewer odors will escape through the vents.
- Illegal Plumbing Connections: Do not connect French drains, foundation drains, sump pumps, floor drains, or other flood control systems to your sanitary sewer. It is illegal, and debris and silt will clog your line. [\(See §176-30.1\).](#) Consult a plumber to correct any illegal connections.

## CITY OF SACO CONTACT NUMBERS

Days and Hours	Department	Phone Numbers
Monday through Friday 6:30AM to 3:00PM	Public Works	284-6641
Weekends, holidays, and after hours	Saco Public Safety Dispatch Center	284-4535