



City of Belleville Sewer Department

SEWER BACKUPS – WHAT EVERY HOMEOWNER SHOULD KNOW

Sewer backups are a problem that every city and its residents face. Here is important information you should know.

- The city is not automatically liable for resulting property damage or cleanup expenses when a sewer backup occurs
- Many homeowner insurance policies exclude damages resulting from sewer backups. Thus, homeowners often end up looking to the city to pay for their damages when their own insurance company denies their claim.
- Many homeowner insurance companies do provide sewer backup coverage and it is possible for homeowners to protect themselves against this risk. Contact your insurance agent regarding coverage for sewer backups.

Illinois courts have made it clear that cities cannot guarantee that sewers will never back up. Common waste from residents and businesses, including disposable diapers and grease, can clog the sewer system. While cities can adopt rules prohibiting the disposal of these things into the sewer, there is no way the city can prevent it.

Other factors, such as tree roots and extraordinary amounts of rainfall, can also cause backups. Gutters and downspouts that are illegally connected to city sewers via the homeowner's laterals are a major contributor to backups.

Common Sewer Backup Problems

Most sewer problems that occur are a result of some type of trouble within the house plumbing or in the sewer line which runs from the house to the city sewer. Contrary to what some think, when invasive tree roots are an issue, cutting down the trees will not alleviate the problem. If tree roots are a recurring problem, the homeowner must have the roots removed from their house sewer line on a routine basis. The ultimate fix, however, can only be accomplished by replacing the sewer line from the house to the street. In some cases, rehabilitating the sewers with liners may avoid the need to dig the entire line.

If You Experience a Sewer Backup

If water backs up in your basement after flushing a toilet, using a clothes or dish washer, or running water, chances are the problem is in your plumbing between the house and the street.

If the sewer is backing up when no water is being used, the problem is more likely to be in the city's sewer line in the street. In this case, contact the city immediately. Even if you are unsure of the cause of the sewer backup, you are advised to call the city first since failure to report a possible problem with a city sewer main could result in significant damage.

To report a sewer backup problem and request emergency assistance, call 618-233-7146 during normal business hours. During holidays, weekends and after hours, call 618-234-1212. A maintenance person will be dispatched to investigate the problem and will attempt to contact you about what was found

Who Cleans Up and Pays for the Mess?

When a sewer backup has occurred in your basement, you are responsible for cleaning up the mess. The city's maintenance persons are not authorized to provide assistance with cleaning up the mess, even if the cause of the backup occurred in the city's sewer main.

Damage Claims

If a person feels the city is responsible for damages incurred as a result of a sewer backup, they must file a written claim with the City of Belleville Human Resources Department at 510 West Main Street. Since it may take several days before a person can fully itemize all damages, they are advised to call the Human Resources Administrator at 618-233-6810 to report any pending claim. Once the administrator receives a formal claim, it will be referred to the city's insurance carrier for investigation by a claims adjuster. The adjuster will make contact by phone with the person filing the claim. Articles of value damaged as a result of the backup should not be disposed of until the adjuster has a chance to see them. Please be advised that filing a claim does not necessarily mean your damages will be paid by the city.

Over the past fifteen years, the city has developed a very aggressive sewer repair and reconstruction program. This has resulted in a dramatic reduction in sewer backup problems, and it is our intention to continue with this effort to provide better and more trouble-free service to our citizens.

If you have any further questions regarding sewer problems or filing a claim, please contact the City of Belleville Wastewater Treatment Plant at 618-233-7146 or visit the Sewer Lines page at belleville.net.