

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Call the City of Winchester Utilities department immediately if you notice any cases of vandalism to sewer lines or manholes. This way the debris can be removed before it causes a backup.

Avoid putting fats, oils and grease (FOG) down your garbage disposal or any household drain. Not only could it accumulate in City lines, it could also build up in your own system and might eventually require the services of a plumber.

Never put disposable diapers or sanitary napkins down the toilet. These are not meant to be disposed of in this manner and stopping up your lines could damage your plumbing system.

WHO SHOULD I CALL TO REPORT A SEWAGE BACKUP?

Emergency crews from the City of Winchester's Utilities Department are on-call 24 hours a day to assist you.

In an emergency such as a sewage line backup, contact the department at:

(540) 662-5353
Monday- Friday
7:30 am - 4:00 pm

(540) 869-1699
After hours, weekends or holidays

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PAYING FOR THE SEWAGE CLEANUP?

Cleanup of sewage backups in homes and offices is generally the responsibility of the property owner or landlord. Property owners are advised to take the following actions after a sewer backup:

- Take photos of the damage.
- Report the damage to your insurance carrier.
- Mitigate further damage by cleaning up the damage yourself, or by calling a reputable cleanup service out of the phone book.
- Individuals wishing to file a claim. If you feel you may have a claim against the City should call the Risk Manager at (540) 667-1815 ext. 1477. *All claims will be investigated.*
- For health related questions, please contact the local Health Department, Environmental Health section at (540) 722-3480.



City of Winchester
Public Services Department
Utilities Division
15 North Cameron Street
Winchester, VA 22601
www.winchesterva.gov/utilities



PREVENT SEWAGE BACKUPS

Important
ANSWERS
to your
QUESTIONS
from the



WHAT CAUSES SEWAGE BACKUPS?

One cause of sewage backups is the accumulation of fats, oils and grease (FOG).

Also, many items that are too large for sewer pipes to handle such as disposable diapers and sanitary napkins are often flushed down toilets.

On occasion, the City experiences vandalism and other solid materials, such as leaves, sticks, trash, toys, towels, plumber's items and shirts. All of these items can cause major backups with both public and private sewer lines.

HOW COULD A SEWAGE BACKUP AFFECT ME?

An overflow in a sewer line generally results from a blockage in the line, causing the sewer to back up into nearby pipes and drains. Blockages can occur in the main sewer lines outside your home, as well as within your home or office plumbing system.

If a backup occurs, the sewage will normally overflow out of the lowest possible opening, which is usually a manhole. However, in some homes, especially those with basements or where the lowest level has the same elevation as the sewer lines, the overflowing sewage may exit lower drains and toilets.

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF SEWAGE BACKING UP INTO MY HOME?

A common exit point for back-up sewage is floor drains in basements.

Here are several suggestions to prevent sewage from entering your home and please consult your plumber for the right solutions:

- Install a backflow, or check valve
- Install a “balloon” in basement floor drains
- Ensure your home is properly vented
- Never dump fats, oils or grease down your drains
- Never flush toys, shirts, diapers or napkins

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SEWAGE BACKS UP INTO MY HOME?

Keeping in mind that ceramic plumbing fixtures such as toilets are fragile, quickly close all drain openings with stoppers or plugs. Tub, sink and floor drains may need additional weight to keep them sealed. A string mop can be used to help plug toilets.

If you suspect the stoppage is in your home plumbing system, do not run water down your drains until the blockage is cleared.

A quick check with several nearby neighbors will help you determine if the blockage is widespread or if it is limited to your home.

If the backup appears to be in your neighborhood’s main line, call City of Winchester Utilities at the number listed on this brochure.

WHAT DOES THE CITY OF WINCHESTER DO TO PREVENT SEWAGE BACKUPS?

City of Winchester makes every attempt to prevent backups in the public sewage system before they occur.

In addition, utility maintenance crews inspect and clean City sewage lines throughout the City. These lines are examined using high-tech video equipment that enables workers to see inside the pipelines.

De-greasing and root control agents are also injected into lines that are prone to blockages, such as those near restaurants, apartments or high density housing developments.

Even with the City’s extensive maintenance program, backups often are beyond the control of the Utilities Department.

WILL MY INSURANCE COVER ANY DAMAGES RESULTING FROM SEWAGE BACKUPS?

In the majority of cases, a special rider, or endorsement is needed on your homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policy to cover damages related to sewer backups or water damage. This optional coverage is generally inexpensive. However, you usually must request it, as it is not automatically included in most standard policies.

All residents (homeowners and tenants alike) are advised to investigate this option.

Like the majority of municipalities around the country, the City of Winchester cannot assume financial liability for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most blockages are related to conditions that are beyond the City’s control.

This is why it is important to verify that your home is adequately insured.

This brochure is not a complete guide for the prevention of sewage back-ups. It is intended for informational purposes only.

A privately contracted plumbing professional should be relied upon for specific concerns and guidance regarding the prevention of sewage back-ups.

