

SEWER BACKUP

NOW WHAT?

OUT OF
ORDER

RESTROOM



www.wallawallawa.gov

Wastewater Collections Division 509.527.4363
After Hours Emergency 509.527.1960



OH NO!

Let's Fix This

It is never pleasant to deal with a sewer backup. However, a prompt and proper response will go a long way toward limiting the possibility of long term health effects and property damage. If a backup does happen, this brochure has information that 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, vomiting after exposure to sewage, promptly contact your doctor.

FIRST THINGS FIRST!

- **Stay out of areas flooded with sewage.** Evacuate if necessary; especially if the backup cannot be isolated. Sewage exposure is particularly dangerous to anyone who is ill or pregnant, the young or elderly, or anyone suffering from respiratory ailments or a weakened immune system.
- **Turn the power off if there is standing water** or the possibility of electrical wires/appliances coming into contact with water or soggy materials.
- **Do not flush toilets or use sinks, showers, dishwashers or laundry machines.**
- **Your homeowners insurance provider may have 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.
- **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.
- **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 or the Walla Walla County Health Department at 509.524.2650 about receiving a tetanus shot.
- **Keep contaminated objects, water and hands away from mucous membranes** (mouth, eyes and nose).
- **Turn off forced air furnaces and air conditioners** if the duct work has sewer water in it.
- **Be careful not to track contamination into other parts of the residence.**
- **Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.**
- **Wash hands frequently,** especially after bathroom use, before eating, and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.
- **Take pictures.**

NOTIFY THE APPROPRIATE PARTY

If an obstruction occurs and you are unsure of where the obstruction is located, call the **City of Walla Walla Public Works Department, Wastewater Collections Division at 509.527.4363** during normal business hours. If it occurs after hours, please call the After Hours Emergency Number at 509.527.1960. The City will dispatch a crew to determine where the obstruction is located and will remove the obstruction if it is in the City main line or will advise you to call a local plumber if it is in the lateral line.

- If it is determined that the **obstruction is in the lateral line call a local plumber,** and then call your homeowners insurance provider.



CLEAN UP!

**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. 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 Yellow Pages under Water Damage Restoration. If you choose to clean up the backup yourself, you should:

- **Dry the space out.** All standing water needs to be removed. A sump pump, wet vac, or bucket may be used. Operate wet vac only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.
- **All solid waste must be collected and discarded.**
- **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.
- **Remove vinyl covered wallpaper** in affected areas, as it slows the drying process.
- **Sort, discard and disinfect, removing all contaminated property** away from the affected areas. Determine which articles can be salvaged and which must be discarded. Be sure to discard all contaminated cardboard, carpets, carpet pads, cosmetics, food, mattresses, pillows, medications, medical supplies, stuffed animals, unfinished furniture and upholstered furniture. Clothing may be salvageable if it can be adequately laundered. Consult with a professional water damage restorer or cleaning professional for specifics.
- **Treat all water-soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as contaminated** until properly cleaned and sanitized.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Disinfect all mops, sponges and brushes.** Launder clothes worn during cleaning separately from other laundry.
- **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.
- **Inspect all affected appliances** before operating them again.

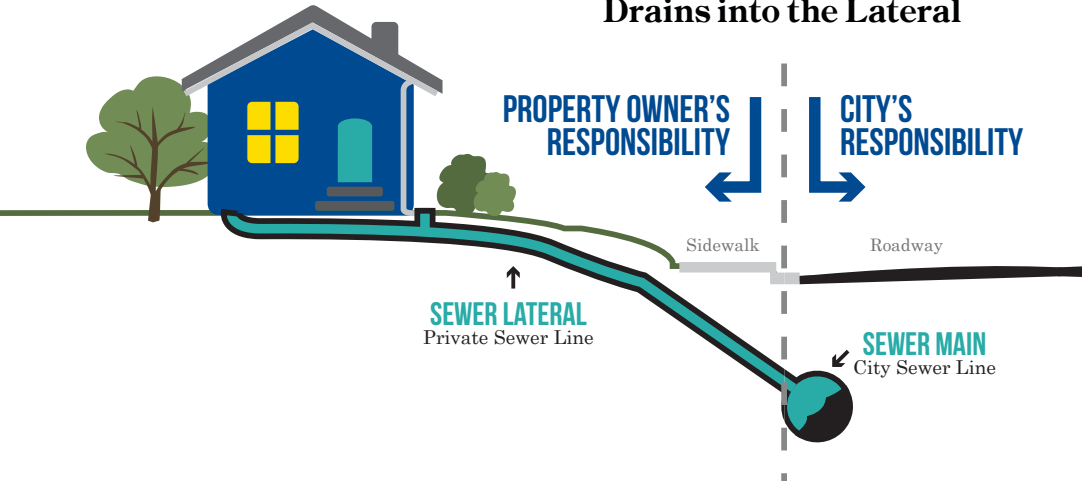


RECORD KEEPING

- Take several **photos before and after the cleanup**. Take photos even if you have also taken video.
- Take **photos of anything that is going to be thrown away**.
- Create a **list of all damaged items**, including those that need to be thrown away.
- **Keep receipts** for all cleaning materials you purchase, any items you had to immediately replace, and/or for any services provided by contractors.
- **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.

TYPICAL HOUSE SEWER CONNECTION

All House Plumbing
Drains into the Lateral



Maintenance of the sewer lateral is the responsibility of the property owner. The sewer main is maintained by the City.

WHO PAYS FOR THE DAMAGE?

Property owners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of all lateral lines (see above). 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.

When the City is called by a property owner for a sewer backup, it is to investigate what has been reported to the City. Please be advised that the mere presence of City staff on your property to assess the sewer back-up problem is not an admission of liability.



FILING A CLAIM

1. Complete a Claim for Damages Form

- Download a Claim for Damages form online at www.wallawallawa.gov/forms-permits under the “Risk Management” tab. Follow the Claim Process directions.
- Alternatively, pick up a form at the **City's Human Resources Department** located at 15 North Third Avenue.

2. Insurance Adjuster Conducts Investigation

- Submittal of a claim for damages does not guarantee payment by the City or its insurance carrier.
- A decision will be made when all of the information has been reviewed and a claims adjuster conducts an investigation.

3. Do Not Delay Cleanup

- Delay often results in more damage occurring.
- Take lots of pictures and track all of your expenses.

4. Responsibility Determined

If the City has a responsibility to you, the amount of claim payment is based on the level of City liability (if any) and the depreciated value (not replacement value) of the property damage.



www.wallawallawa.gov/forms-permits
City of Walla Walla Risk Manager 509.527.4475

If you contacted the City in an emergency, as a public service, City employees may have assisted you in a minor clean up. This assistance does not constitute an admission or acceptance of liability on the part of the City.



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