

Island View Sanitary District

Sewer Backup Policy

Sewer backups are an unfortunate but common problem in all U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal departments make every effort to prevent such incidents, they still may occur. The following information is offered to help property owners and residents understand why backups happen, how they can be prevented, and what steps citizens should take if a sewer backup affects their property.

What causes a sewer backup?

Sanitary sewer overflows can be caused by several factors. They usually involve sewer pipe blockages in either main sewer lines or service laterals (lines between buildings and the main line). Causes may include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, system deterioration, insufficient system capacity, or construction mishaps. In home plumbing systems, the main cause is accumulation of grease, tree roots, hair, or solid materials such as disposable diapers or sanitary napkins that are too large for wastewater pipes to handle. Such materials may cause major backups in main lines and lift stations as well as in residents' lateral lines. Another cause of blockages within the main line is due to vandalism. Leaves, sticks, rocks, bricks, trash, and stolen items from home or car burglaries, have been found stuffed down manholes. We hope you will report observations of any such activity. By law, manhole covers are to be opened only by District personnel or by permission from the Sanitary District.

How could a sewer backup affect me?

If the backup occurs in a District maintained line, the wastewater 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 is even with the sewer lines—the overflowing wastewater may exit through the home's lower drains and toilets.

What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?

- Close all drain openings with stoppers or plugs. Tub, sink, and floor drains may need additional weight to keep them sealed.
- Don't run any water down your drains until the blockage has been cleared.
- A check with nearby neighbors will help determine if the backup appears to be widespread in your neighborhood.
- Call the Head Lift Station Operator, Jim Latta at 920-216-6421.

If I call our system operator, what will they do about a sewer backup onto my property?

- You will be asked questions about the backup timing, location, the property, etc.
- System operator will check for blockages in the main line. If found, the blockage will be cleared as soon as possible.
- If the main line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumber or sewer contractor to check your lateral line. Maintenance and repair of the lateral line is the owner's responsibility. If you have a broken lateral pipe, it must be fixed immediately.
- To minimize damage and negative health issues, arrange for cleanup of the property as soon as possible. There are qualified businesses that specialize in this type of cleanup.

Is there anything I can do to prevent sewage backup into my home?

- Do not put grease down in your garbage disposal or household drains. It can solidify, collect debris, and accumulate in main lines and lift stations or build up in your own system lines.
- Never flush disposable diapers, sanitary napkins, or paper towels down the toilet. They can plug up your drains and damage your plumbing system.
- If the lowest level of your home is below ground level, such as a basement floor drain, a backup may one day affect it. One way to prevent sewage backup through below ground areas is to install a "back-flow valve" on the lowest drain(s). You can also use a plumber's test plug to close these drains when not in use.
- For further information about preventive measures, contact your licensed plumber.

What does the District do to prevent backups?

- Every attempt is made to prevent backups in the public system before they occur. Sewer mains are specially designed to prevent accumulation and stoppages.
- In addition, we have maintenance people that are devoted to inspecting and cleaning wastewater mains throughout the District on a regular schedule.
- Even with our maintenance schedule, backups can occur and are beyond the District's control.

Will insurance cover any damage to my home or property?

In the majority of cases a special rider will need to be added to your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy to cover damage related to sewage backups or water damage. This optional coverage is generally not very expensive, but you must usually request that it be added to your policy.

As with the majority of municipalities or sewer districts, the Island View Sanitary District does not assume financial responsibility for damage resulting from sewage backups since most blockages are related to conditions that are beyond the District's control. It is important for property owners to confirm with their insurance carrier that they are adequately covered.

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