

DEALING WITH SEWERS & PREVENTING BACKUPS

A sewer backup can create a stressful and emotional situation for the homeowner/renter. In some cases, it may cause health and safety concerns as well as significant property loss. A proper response to a sewer backup can greatly minimize property damage and diminish the threat of illness.

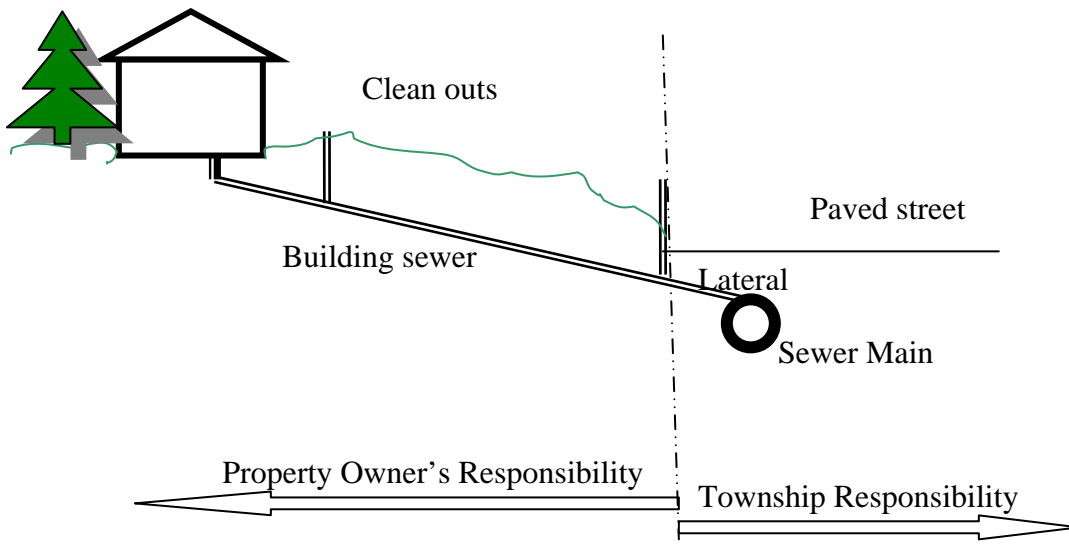
Dover Township makes every effort to be responsive to residents' needs and concerns when a sewer backup occurs. Dover Township has a crew whose main duty is to inspect, clean and maintain sewers. Unfortunately, because a sewer is not a closed system, many things that are put into the sewer can clog the system. Large amounts of grease from homes and disposable diapers are two common items that cause problems. Another problem is tree roots, which can grow into and obstruct the system.

While Dover Township has adopted rules prohibiting the discharge of any substance likely to cause a sewer obstruction, and we try to educate the public about the problems they cause, there is really no way we can absolutely prevent this from happening. Many factors can cause backups and they are beyond the scope of normal maintenance. Many homeowners' insurance policies exclude damage resulting from sewer backups. However, some insurance companies do provide sewer backup coverage. **If you are concerned about the possibility of a sewer backup and want to assure that you are covered, we urge you to check with your home insurer regarding the availability of sewer backup insurance, and include cleanup costs as well as repairs and replacement.** Courts have determined that local governments are liable only if there is negligent operation of a system. A local government cannot guarantee that a public system will not backup. Items such as disposable diapers and grease (as well as toys and dentures) that are placed into the system by residents and businesses can cause unavoidable backups despite regular maintenance and cleaning of lines. If you use your basement for storage of valuable antiques or spend a lot of money refinishing that basement, get that extra insurance! Also, you may want to check with your plumber about installing a backwater valve. It may cost you several hundred dollars but it may save your basement.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you experience a sewer problem, please call Dover Township at 717-292-3634 during normal working hours (Mon-Fri, 8-4) or 911 at other times and state that you are reporting a sewer emergency. Backed up sewer lines, line breaks, sewage odors and overflowing manholes are considered an emergency. CALL DOVER TOWNSHIP FIRST before calling a plumber if you think you may have a problem. We will check the sewer main and lateral and then inform you of our findings. There is no cost to you for the township to check. Of course, we would prefer that you call during normal work hours to save all of us the expense of overtime. If the problem is not in the main line sewer or lateral, you will be advised to contact a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service.

BUILDING SEWER vs. LATERAL vs. SEWER MAIN: The building sewer is the pipe that extends from the connection point through your yard and into the building. The owner of the property is responsible for maintaining and cleaning the building sewer within the building as well as the line in the property up to the connection point. A cleanout is required past the connection point and is considered part of the building sewer. A sewer main is a pipeline, usually in the street or through a right-of-way that transports the sewage from many homes and buildings to the wastewater treatment plant. A sewer lateral is the short pipe line that extends from the sewer main to the curb line or property line, or where the building sewer connects. The

Township is responsible for the sewer lateral and sewer main only.



More often than not, the cause of a backup in the lateral or building sewer is from items that the line is not meant to handle, such as kid's toys, underwear, candles, towels, diapers, paper products (other than toilet paper), keys, and even false teeth. To avoid flushing these items, remember to close the toilet lid. What you flush down the toilet may not only affect you, but it might also cause problems for your neighbors! Another possible cause of problems could be roots in your building sewer. It's best not plant trees or bushes above your building sewer. The building sewer is the responsibility of the owner of the property from the house to the connection point of the lateral. You will need to call a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service. Check your Yellow Pages. Dover Township cannot make a recommendation. It may be in your best interest to obtain several estimates.

WAYS TO PREVENT BACKUPS IN YOUR BUILDING SEWER, LATERAL AND THE MAIN LINE SEWER:

The property owner can do many things to prevent the sewers from backing up. If everyone would be careful about how they dispose of certain products, our systems would be a great deal more efficient, experience far fewer backups, cost us all less money, and prevent a lot of misery.

- **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 owners' line, or in the main sewer. When this happens, the line constricts, and eventually clogs.
- **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 sewer main. These products do not deteriorate quickly. They become lodged in portions of the lateral/main, causing a sewer backup. These products should also be disposed of in the garbage.
- **Roots:** Shrubs and trees, seeking moisture, will make their way into sewer line cracks. 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 back up. Old clay or iron pipe may be more susceptible to root penetration but it could happen to new plastic pipe. The other alternative is to avoid planting around your building sewer. If you have continuing problems with tree roots in your building sewer, you may have to have them cut periodically. If you have a plumber cut out roots in your building sewer, please call us, so that we can clean the sewer main.

- **Sewer Odor:** Another concern that property owners have is that they can smell sewer odors inside their home or building. There are many ways to prevent this from occurring. Under each drain in your plumbing system, there is a "P-trap". If there is water in this fitting, odor or gases from the sewer cannot enter through the drain from either the property owner's lateral or the sewer main. Periodically, check to make sure that unused 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 nests, leaves, etc. When these vents are clear, the sewer odors will escape through these vents.
- **Illegal Plumbing Connections:** DO NOT connect French drains, sump pumps, rain gutters, and other flood control systems to your sanitary sewer. It is illegal, and debris and silt will clog your line. That extra storm water in a sewer pipe could cause the pipe to overflow and back up. Consult a plumber to correct any illegal connections.
- **Needles:** Unfortunately, some people dispose of hypodermic needles in the sewer system. The presence of these needles in the wastewater collection system presents special and possible deadly problems for wastewater collection and wastewater treatment employees. **PLEASE DO NOT FLUSH NEEDLES.** The proper method of disposal is to re-cap the needle and put it into a "sharps container". (This could be any rigid plastic container such as a bleach bottle...no milk bottles please.) When it is full, tape the container securely, and call your local pharmacy for advice on proper disposal methods. **PLEASE DO NOT FLUSH THEM OR THROW THEM INTO THE GARBAGE!**
- **Install a Backwater Prevention Valve:** A backwater valve can prevent or greatly reduce the possibility of a sewer backup. A backwater valve is a fixture installed into a sewer line, and sometimes into a drain line, in the basement of your building to prevent sewer backflows. A properly installed and maintained backwater valve works on a one-way system, sewage can go out, but cannot come back in. Property owners are responsible for the installation and maintenance of backwater valves. The cost to install one is dependent upon the type of plumbing in your home and the difficulty of installation. A qualified plumber can assist you in determining your needs.
- If you use your basement for storage, use plastic containers to keep your possessions dry. Place items off the floor on blocks. Plastic garbage bags crack, then leak and aren't good for storage. Imagine that your basement flooded today – how much would you lose? Insurance cannot replace the family pictures and the baby shoes. Protect them and store them in a safe place now.
- We sincerely wish that sewer lines (main, lateral or a building sewer) never need to be dug up. However, that possibility exists. Therefore, it is in the homeowner's best interest not to build over any sewer. If there is a sewer right-of-way going through your property, and you place a shed, garage, patio, driveway, etc. over top of it, you are gambling. There is always a chance that the sewer may have to be dug up and you lose the bet.

More information is available on the Township's website: www.dovertownship.org