

YOUR SEWER

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW & DID NOT WANT TO ASK

- 📌 **GENERAL INFORMATION:** A sewer backup creates 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.

Arlington Water Utilities (AWU) makes every effort to be responsive to a residents' needs and concerns when a sewer backup occurs. AWU has crews whose sole duty is to inspect, clean and maintain sewers on a daily basis. Unfortunately, because a sewer is not a closed system, many things put into the sewer can clog the system. Large amounts of grease from improper disposal and flushing of insolubles (such as paper, diapers, plastic and even food and vegetables) contribute to sewer problems. While AWU has adopted rules prohibiting the discharge of any substance likely to cause a sewer obstruction, and can try to educate the public about the problems they cause, there is really no way we can absolutely prevent this from happening. Other factors can cause backups as well, such as tree roots, which can grow into and obstruct the system.

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 insure that you are covered, AWU urges you to check with your home insurer regarding the availability of sewer backup insurance. If this is not available in your homeowner's policy, your insurer should be able to make recommendations.**

- 📌 **CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you experience a sewer problem, please call AWU at 817-459-5900 and state that you are reporting a sewer emergency. Backed up sewer lines, line breaks, sewage odors and overflowing manholes are considered an emergency.

If the problem is in the sewer lateral, the homeowner or business is responsible for correcting the problem. The owner of the property is responsible for maintaining and cleaning the sewer lateral from the building (or home) up to and including the connection on the sewer main. Locating the lateral is also the responsibility of the property owner. AWU has **SOME** records showing the location of these lateral lines. Several plumbers also have special locating equipment, which will be helpful.

If the problem is in the sewer lateral, whom do you call for help? You will need to call a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service. Check your Yellow Pages or Internet. AWU cannot make a recommendation. It may be in your best interest to obtain several estimates.

REMEMBER TO CALL AWU FIRST at 817-459-5900 before calling a plumber. We will check the sewer main and inform you of our findings. If the problem is not in the main line sewer, you will be advised to contact a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service.

- 📌 **LATERAL vs. MAIN:** What is a sewer lateral? A sewer lateral or house lateral is the pipe line between the sewer main, usually located in the street, and the building. The sewer lateral is owned and maintained by the property owner including any part, which may extend into the street or public right of way.

More often than not, the cause of a backup in your lateral is from items that the line is not meant to handle, such as kid's toys, underwear, 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 affect you, but it might cause problems for your neighbors! Another possible cause would be roots in your lateral. The lateral is the responsibility of the owner of the property from the house to the street.

WAYS TO PREVENT BACKUPS IN YOUR LATERAL AND THE MAIN LINE SEWER: The property owner can do many things to prevent the lateral from backing up. Remember too, that the very same things can help to prevent backup's in the sewer main

as well. If everyone would be careful about how they dispose of certain products, our systems would be a great deal more efficient, cause 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, as does bathroom tissue. 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. One way to prevent roots from entering your line is to replace your line with new plastic pipe. The other alternative is to be careful about planting greenery around your sewer line. If you have continuing problems with tree roots in your lateral, you may have to have them cut periodically.

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 floor drains, sinks, and unused showers or tubs 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 and other flood control systems to your sanitary sewer. It is illegal, and debris and silt will clog your line. 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 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.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is AWU's responsibility regarding private sewer laterals?

A: The property owner is fully responsible for maintaining adequate sewage flow to and through the sewer lateral, from the property structure up to and including the tap on the sewer main. When failure or stoppage of a sewer lateral occurs, AWU crews will respond only to check the sewer main to verify that the main is open and sewage is flowing. If the sewer main is found to be clear, it is the responsibility of the property owner to call a licensed plumber or drain cleaning service to correct the problem. Verbal assistance and answers to questions can be received by calling AWU at 817-459-5900.

Q: What if my sewer backs up?

A: If you experience a sewer backup, call us at 817-459-5900. This number is answered 24 hours per day/365 days per year.

We will dispatch a crew to your address to determine if the stoppage is in the sewer main or your sewer lateral. If the sewer main is found to be clear, it is the responsibility of the property owner to call a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service to correct the problem. The property owner is responsible for maintaining adequate flow to and through the sewer lateral from the property structure and into the sewer main. If you know or suspect that your lateral line is defective, please refer to our brochure "Suffering from Sewer Problems?" for information regarding eligibility for AWU's Cost Sharing Program. If the blockage is in the sewer main we will fix it as quickly as possible and keep you informed about what is being done.

Q: What about the mess?

A: A sewer backup can lead to disease, destruction of valuables, damage to your house, and electrical malfunctions. Prompt cleanup of affected property can help minimize the inconvenience and damage. See our page regarding "[Cleaning up the Mess](#)".

Q: What about disease prevention?

A: Read the information on our site regarding "[disease prevention](#)".