



CITY OF SHEBOYGAN  
PUBLIC WORKS

# PREVENTING A SEWAGE BACKUP

## GENERAL INFORMATION

A sewer backup creates a stressful and emotional situation for the property owner/renter. In some cases, it may cause health and safety concerns as well as significant property loss. Preventing the sewer from backing up is the best way to minimize these concerns.

A sanitary sewer is not a closed system and a wide variety of things put into the sewer can clog the system. Grease/cooking oils, wipes, disposable (and cloth) diapers, and tree roots are some of the reasons systems can backup. Broken or damaged sewer laterals will also cause backups occur. While the City of Sheboygan has adopted rules prohibiting the discharge of any substance likely to cause a sewer obstruction, enforcement can be difficult. Education is the best form of prevention.

The City has a sewer crew whose sole duty is to inspect, clean, and maintain the City's sewer mains daily. They are available 24-hours a day, seven days a week to minimize the possibility of sewer problems. However, most of the problems that property owner's face are found in the sewer line that connects their house or business to the City's sewer main. This private line, commonly called a sewer lateral, is the property owner's responsibility.

Call the City immediately if sewage is coming up inside your home. The City's sewer crew will verify the sewer main serving your area is flowing correctly and there are no blockages.

Many homeowners' insurance policies exclude coverage of damage resulting from sewer backups. The City recommends checking with your home insurer regarding sewer backup insurance coverage.

***No one wants  
their sewage back***

*Follow these "Best Management Practices" to minimize your risk*

## Contact Information

**Monday - Friday**  
**7:30A - 4:00P**  
**920.459.3440**

**After-hours/  
Weekends**  
**920.459.3333**

## WHAT IS A SEWER LATERAL?

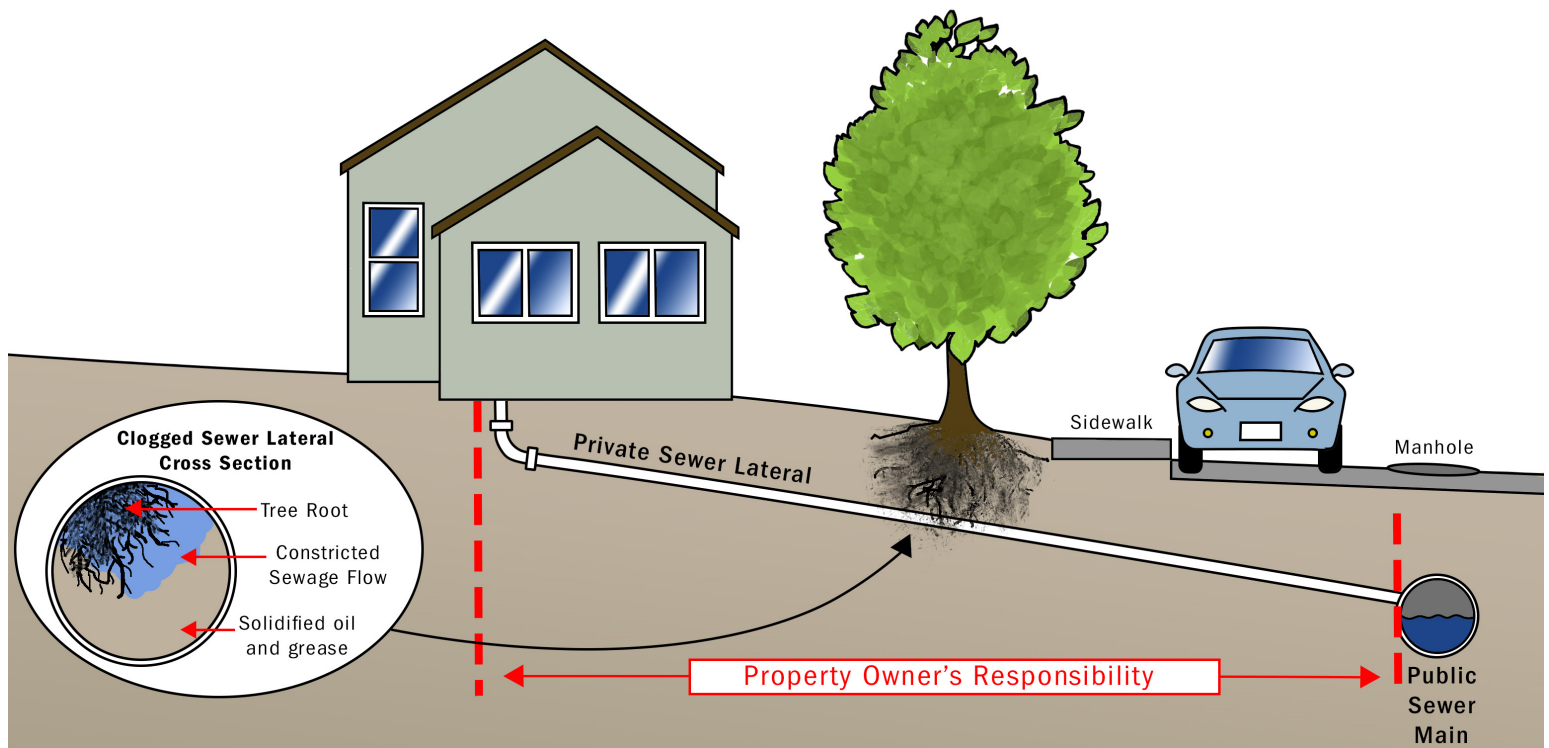
A sewer lateral or house lateral is the pipeline between the City sanitary sewer main (usually located in the street) and the building. The sewer lateral is owned and maintained by the property owner, including any part extending into the street or public right of way.

More often than not, the cause of a backup in your lateral is from items that the sewer line is not meant to handle. Other possible causes would be broken/damaged laterals or roots in your lateral. **The lateral is the responsibility of the property owner from the house to, and including connection on, the City's sewer main.**

## WHAT IS A SEWER MAIN?

A sewer main is the municipal owned sewer system that carries wastewater from all the private laterals to the wastewater treatment facility. These sewer mains are often found in the street or within the right of way. The City is responsible for the proper operation and ongoing maintenance of the sewer main.

The property owner is fully responsible for maintaining adequate sewage flow through the sewer lateral and into the City's sewer main, including the connection on the sewer main. When a sewer lateral failure or stoppage occurs, the City 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 property owner's responsibility to call a licensed plumber or drain cleaning service to correct the problem.** Locating the lateral is also the responsibility of the property owner. The City of Sheboygan Building Inspection Department has records showing these lateral lines' location through filed plumbing permits.

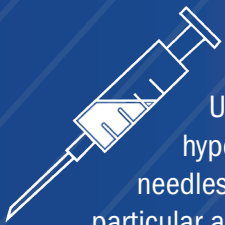


# 3 EASY WAYS TO PREVENT A SEWAGE BACKUP



## No Wipes Down the Pipes!

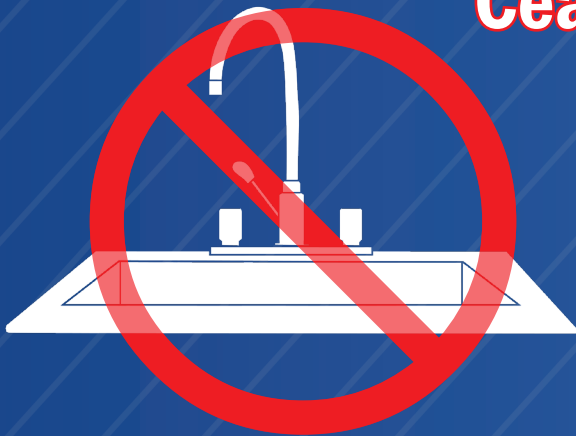
Paper towels, disposable (and cloth) diapers, and feminine products cause a lot of problems in the property owner's lateral as well as in the City main. These products are built for absorption and durability, and do not deteriorate quickly, as does bathroom tissue. They become lodged in portions of the lateral/main, causing a sewer backup. **These products need to be disposed of in the garbage.**



Unfortunately, some people dispose of hypodermic needles in the sewer system. These needles in the wastewater collection system present particular and possible deadly problems for wastewater collection and wastewater treatment employees. The proper disposal method is to re-cap the needle and put it into a "sharps container."

## No drugs down the drain!

Prescription Drugs, Over-The-Counter Medications - contain chemicals that you don't want entering the wastewater supply. Keep in mind that sewage is treated and recycled, so we want to keep our wastewater as chemical-free as possible. Our wastewater treatment plants were not designed to remove all those chemicals from the water.



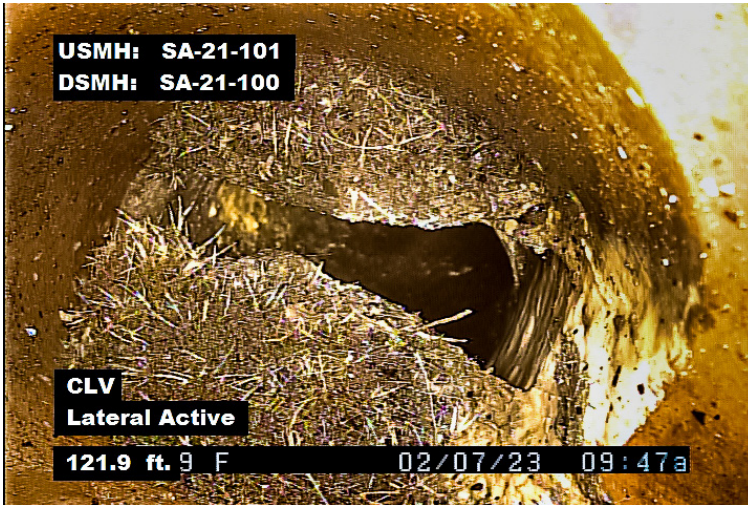
## Cease the Grease!

Cooking oil and grease should be poured into a heat-resistant container and disposed of after it cools off, in the garbage, not down 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 owner's line, or the main sewer. When this happens, the line constricts and eventually clogs.

# BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO PREVENT SEWER BACKUPS

Property owners should follow these recommendations as “Best Management Practices” to aid in the prevention of the sewer lateral from becoming blocked. Following these recommendations will also aid in keeping the sewer main in the street flowing properly.

If everyone were careful about how they dispose of certain products, our systems would be a great deal more efficient, cause fewer backups, cost less to maintain, and prevent any potential health and safety concerns.



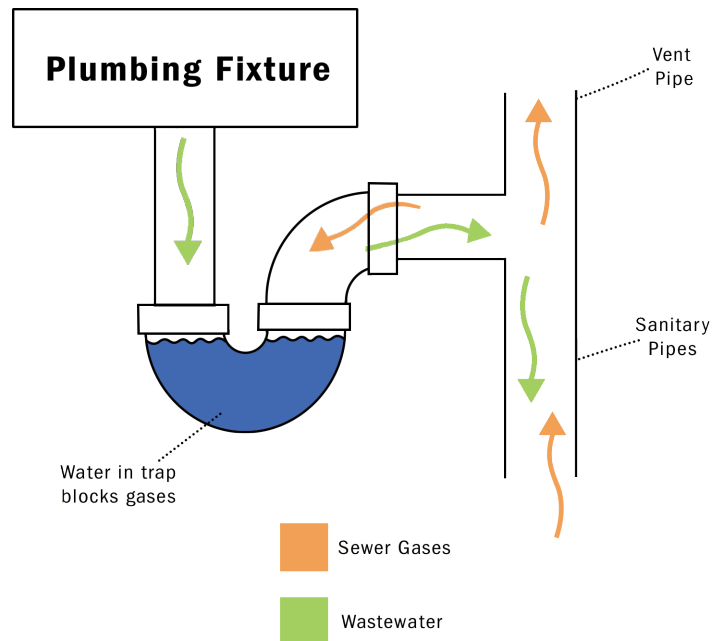
Tree roots almost completely blocking a sewer lateral.

## ROOTS

Shrubs and trees, seeking moisture, will make their way into sewer line cracks. These roots can cause extensive damage. They may start small, getting into a small crack in the pipe, but as the tree or shrub continues to grow, so does the root. After some time, this causes your sewer line to break, which allows debris to hang up in the line, thus causing a backup. One way to prevent roots from entering your line is to replace your line and tap with a new plastic pipe. Root problems can be reduced by avoiding planting greenery on or around your sewer line. If you have continuing problems with tree roots in your lateral, you may have to have them cut out periodically.

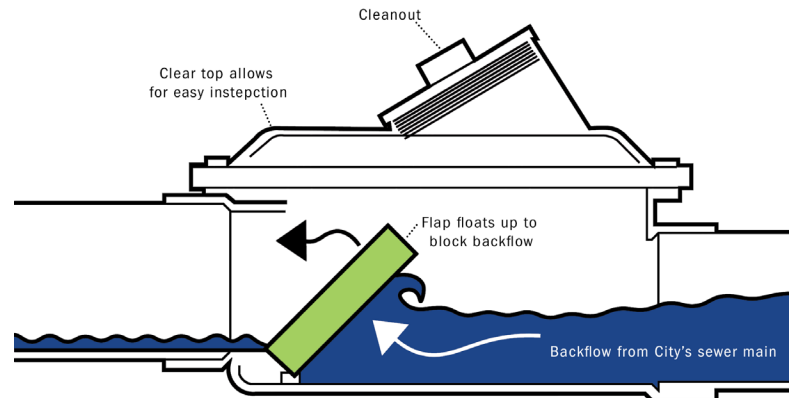
## SEWER ODOR

Another concern that property owners have is that they can smell sewer odors inside their house or building. There are many ways to prevent this from occurring. Under each drain in your plumbing system is a “P-Trap.” If there is water in this pitting, odors or gases from the sewer cannot enter through the drain from either the property owner’s lateral or the City main. Periodically check to ensure that unused floor drains, sinks, etc. have water in the “P-Trap.” Another way to prevent sewer odor is to ensure that the vents located on your roof are free from bird nests, leaves, etc. When these vents are clear, the sewer odors will escape through these vents.



## INSTALL A BACKWATER PREVENTION VALVE

A backwater valve can prevent or significantly 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 your building's basement 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 depends on the type of plumbing in your home and the difficulty of installation. A qualified plumber can assist you in determining your needs.



## ILLEGAL PLUMBING CONNECTIONS

**Do not** connect French drains, sump pumps, and other flood control systems to your sanitary sewer. It is unlawful, and debris and silt will clog your line. Consult a plumber to correct any illegal connections.

**82% OF THE SEWAGE BACKUP CALLS THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS RECEIVES, THE SEWER LATERAL IS PLUGGED**