

Preventing Sewage Backups

How could a sewage backup affect me?

An overflow in a sewage line generally results from a blockage in the line, causing the sewage to back up into nearby pipes and drains. Blockages can occur in the main sewer lines outside your home, as well as within your home or office plumbing system. If the backup occurs in a DCWA-maintained line, the sewage normally will 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 has the same elevation as the sewer lines, the overflowing sewage may exit through lower drains and toilets.

What causes sewage backups?

In home and office plumbing systems, the main cause is accumulation of grease, hair and other solid materials. Also, many items that are too large for sewage pipes to handle, such as disposable diapers and sanitary napkins, often are flushed down toilets. All of these items can cause major backups with both private and public sewer lines.

What can I do?

There are a couple of simple rules to follow to prevent most common sewage backups.

- Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or any household drain. Not only could it accumulate in DCWA-maintained sewer lines, it could also build up in your own system and eventually require the services of a plumber.
- Never flush disposable diapers or sanitary napkins down the toilet. Toilets and sewer lines are not designed to handle disposal of these items. Besides stopping up lines, they could damage your plumbing system.

Is there anything I can do to reduce the possibility of sewage backing up into my home?

If the lowest level of your home or office is above ground level, it is unlikely that you will ever have a problem with overflows from Authority sewage lines. However, if the lowest level is below ground level, there is a possibility that you may one day be affected by a backup.

Normally, if a blockage occurs in your neighborhood's main sewage line, only the lowest level drains and toilets will be affected. A common exit point for backed-up sewage is floor drains located in basements. One way to prevent sewage from backing up at these locations is to install a backflow valve on the lowest drain. For floor drains, a plumber's test plug can be used to close the drain when not in use. For more information about these items and other preventative measures, contact a plumber or plumbing-supply dealer.

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

Keeping in mind that ceramic plumbing fixtures such as toilets are fragile, quickly close all drain openings with stoppers or plugs. Tub, sink and floor drains may need additional weight to keep them sealed. If you suspect the stoppage is in your home plumbing system, do not run water down your drains until the blockage is cleared. A quick check with several nearby neighbors will help you determine if the blockage is widespread or if it is limited to your home. There should also be a cleanout located where the sewage line leaves your house. You can unscrew the plug and look in the pipe to see if sewage is backed up in the pipe. If the backup appears to be in your neighborhood's main line, call the Dinwiddie County Water Authority at (804) 861-0998 to report the problem.

What does the Dinwiddie County Water Authority do to prevent sewage backups?

The Dinwiddie County Water authority makes every attempt to prevent backups in the sewage system before they occur. Sewer lines are specifically designed to prevent accumulation and blockages. In addition, utility maintenance crews inspect and clean sewage lines throughout the DCWA service area.

Will my insurance cover any damages resulting from sewage backups?

In the majority of cases, a special rider is needed on your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy to cover damages related to sewage backups or water damage. This optional coverage is generally inexpensive. However, in most cases the homeowner or renter must request it, as it is not automatically included in most policies. Customers whose homes may be vulnerable to backups, such as those with lower levels below the ground, are especially advised to investigate this option. Contact your insurance carrier for more information.

The Dinwiddie County Water Authority does not assume any financial liability for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most blockages are related to conditions that are beyond DCWA's control. For this reason, it is important to verify that your home is adequately insured.

Whom should I call to report a sewage backup?

Contact the Dinwiddie County Water Authority. Emergency technicians are on call 24 hours a day to assist you. In an emergency such as a sewage line backup, contact the department at:

- 804-861-0998 Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.
- 804-861-0998 after hours and on weekends or holidays – follow emergency contact instructions.