

SEWAGE BACKUP GUIDE

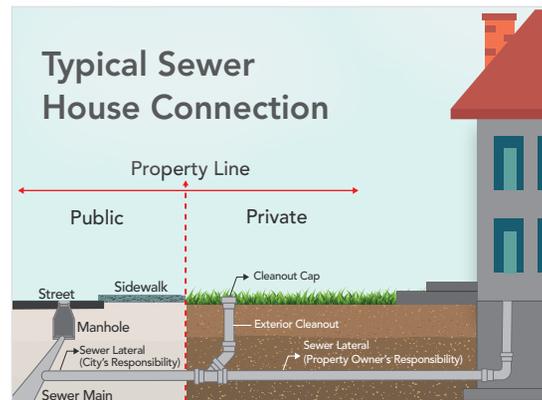


PREVENTING THE PROBLEM BEFORE IT HAPPENS

The Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW)

prepared this guide to provide customers with information regarding sewage backups. The guide includes (1) steps you can take to prevent sewer backups; (2) potential health risks; (3) what to do if a backup happens; (4) recommendations for documenting your expenses; (5) guidelines to consider during cleanup; (6) the DPW Expedited Reimbursement Program; and (7) the General Liability Claims process.

A typical sewer to house connection is shown below.



All properties should install an exterior cleanout in accordance with City Code. If a problem occurs in the house connection and an exterior cleanout is not available, you must hire a licensed plumber to assess and resolve the problem.

- Do not flush grease, rags, diapers, plastics, wipes, personal sanitary items, or similar waste.
- Do not plant trees or bushes near sewer lines and laterals.
- Disconnect downspouts and sump pumps from your house connection.
- Hire a licensed plumber to install an exterior cleanout.

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CAUSES AND RISKS

Causes: Sewage backups have two primary causes.

- **Pipe blockages or failures.** These problems can be caused by inappropriate disposal of fats/oils/grease, wipes/rags/sanitary products, root intrusion, or pipe deterioration.
- **Stormwater and groundwater entering your sewer system during wet weather**—these flows may occur directly (through illegal connections) or indirectly (through cracks and loose joints).

Health risks: Sewage may contain bacteria, viruses, and other pollutants that can cause disease and contaminate property. Health risk factors depend on: (1) the amount of sewage; (2) the type of germs/contaminants; (3) the length of time sewage has been in contact with materials in your home or business; and (4) how much and how long you are exposed.

- Consider installing a backflow preventer and/or grinder pump.
- Consider purchasing a sewer backup rider for your insurance policy.
- Consider purchasing an extended warranty for your pipes—the City partners with HomeServe USA to offer low-cost, extended warranties.
- **More information found here:** www.homeserveusa.com.

WHAT TO DO



Prevent Electrocutation by turning off the power if there is standing water or electrical wires, as the wires may come into contact with water or soggy materials.



Do not flush your toilet or run your faucet, dishwasher, or washing machine until the backup is resolved.



Keep all children and pets **away** from the sewage.



Notify DPW:



Call "311" to notify the City that a backup is occurring.



Go to the 311 website:

<http://www.baltimorecity.gov/311-services>



Do not touch sewage with bare hands. Wear rubber gloves when handling anything contaminated with sewage. Wash hands immediately after handling.

TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Wear protective eyewear, gloves, and boots – avoid unprotected contact with sewage.

- **Wash hands** thoroughly.
- **Protect** all cuts, scrapes, and open wounds. Immediately wash and disinfect any wound that comes into contact with sewage.
- **Never mix bleach with ammonia** – it makes a deadly gas.
- **Do not flush wipes.** Many wipes labeled as “flushable” do not dissolve properly in the sewer system. Instead, these wipes accumulate inside pipes and pump systems, causing back-ups and overflows.
- **Do not connect sump pumps, gutters, roof drainage, and similar drainage systems to the sanitary sewer system without a permit from DPW.** These connections can overwhelm your sewer system during wet weather.

DOCUMENTATION AND CLEANUP

DPW does not clean sewage backups. Customers are responsible for all cleanup and disinfection of private property. The risk increases the longer sewage remains in contact with building interiors. Dry out the affected area promptly, discard contaminated materials, and clean/disinfect as soon as possible.

Document all costs related to the sewage backup. To request reimbursement, provide copies of all receipts, invoices, charges, and other documentation of cleanup and disinfection costs. Document and take pictures of all property damage and the affected area. Documentation is vital to file claims with your insurance company.



HIRE SOMEONE OR DO IT YOURSELF?

Decide whether or not to hire a cleanup professional. You may wish to call your insurance provider to determine whether your policy covers cleanup. The State of Maryland does not certify cleanup companies. However, the Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) provides education and standards for contractors who perform this work, and you may ask your contractor to follow these guidelines. The IICRC also lists cleanup companies organized by zip code and provides other useful information on its website: <http://www.iicrc.org/>. You may also call the IICRC at 844-464-4272. Note that this number is not toll-free.

Hire a Professional

You may want to hire a professional if:

- Insurance will pay for it
- Ductwork is contaminated
- Sewage remains indoors for 24+ hours
- The job is large or complex

If you decide to hire a contractor, you may wish to contact the Consumer Protection Division of the Maryland Attorney General's Office <http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/CPD/default.aspx> or call 410-576-6550 between 9am and 3pm and ask if the contractor has a complaint history file. Keep copies of any receipts or invoices for your files.

Do it yourself

If you clean the sewage backup, protect yourself, and consider following these guidelines. For more information, contact the City Health Department.

1. Dry the area

- Remove all standing water with a wet vac or bucket/mop, and place it in your toilet. Do not flush your toilet until the backup is resolved.
- Control the temperature to increase evaporation, ventilation, and dehumidification. Only use whole-house air conditioners or furnace blowers if the air ducts were not impacted by wastewater.
- Collect and discard any solids.
- Remove vinyl wallpaper in affected areas – it may slow the drying process.
- Expose affected areas to sunlight.

2. Discard and disinfect

- Determine what can be salvaged and what must be discarded. Always discard contaminated food, cosmetics, medicine, or medical supplies.
- Consider discarding all contaminated porous materials, including paper or

cardboard, books and magazines, carpets and rugs, upholstered furniture, unfinished wood, wallboard, upholstered items, and anything else that is difficult to clean. Certain items may be salvageable if they can be adequately laundered. Discuss with a professional cleaner for specifics, and save any receipts for your records.

- Go to <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/solid-waste/drop-off> or call 311 to locate one of DPW's free Citizen Drop-off Centers where you can dispose of contaminated material.
- If you see a water line or stain on wallboard or paneling from the sewage backup, the material and underlying insulation should be removed up to several inches above the water line.
- **Do not skip this step, or disinfection will be ineffective!** Wash the affected area with detergent solution to remove surface dirt and contamination. Allow the area to air-dry.
- Apply a disinfectant labeled as bactericidal (kills bacteria) or a solution of 1/4 cup bleach in one gallon of water. **Follow all manufacturer's directions on proper usage and application. Always use proper ventilation while cleaning and disinfecting.** Allow the area to air-dry.

EXPEDITED REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

DPW offers an Expedited Reimbursement Program for certain sewage backups caused by wet weather. Eligibility is based on the conditions established in Appendix E of the City's Modified Consent Decree. For additional details regarding eligibility, please visit <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/sewer-consent-decree>.

Acceptance or denial of applications under the Expedited Reimbursement Program is not a determination of fault or liability. All determinations of liability are made by the Baltimore City Law Department. If you wish to submit a claim to the Law Department, you must file a separate claim form (see next page).

Submitting an Application. The Expedited Reimbursement Program offers repayment up to \$2,500.00 of clean-up and disinfection costs that are documented appropriately. If your application is determined to be eligible, you must sign a release from any cleanup or disinfection costs before your check can be processed. Applications are available on DPW's website and from the Customer Support and Services Division in the lobby of the Abel Wolman Municipal Building, located at 200 Holliday Street.



To be eligible, you must:

- File a completed "Application For Expedited Reimbursement of Building Backup." Applications are available on DPW's website, at the DPW Customer Support and Services Walk-in Center at 200 Holliday Street, and upon request.
- Be a homeowner, tenant, or other residential customer.
- Experience a sewage backup resulting from surcharging in the sanitary sewer system caused by wet weather.
- Report the sewage backup to the City within 24 hours by calling 311.
- File an application with the DPW Office of Legal and Regulatory Affairs (OLRA) within 90 days after the incident.

How to file an application. Your application is effective when received by OLRA. If your application is incomplete, you will be notified. You must provide all necessary documentation to OLRA before your application may be processed.

Applications are processed within 60 days after receipt of all necessary information and documentation. Failure to provide necessary information and/or documentation may delay your application.

Documents Required.

- Copies of all receipts, invoices, billing/account statements, etc., that document cleaning and/or disinfection costs arising from the backup.
- If you are a tenant, you must provide a copy of your lease signed by the owner of record.

- If you are filing an application on behalf of an owner or tenant, you must include proof of power of attorney.
- If you are insured against sewage backups, you must receive a final determination from your insurance company before your application can be finalized. Regardless, you must file an application with OLRA within 90 days after the sewage backup. You must supplement your application with the documentation from your insurer within 30 days after receipt. Applications received after this deadline will be denied as untimely.
- You must include all documentation submitted to and received from your insurance company, including documentation of any deductible paid.

GENERAL LIABILITY CLAIMS

The Baltimore City Law Department makes all determinations of liability on behalf of the City. You may file a claim for any damages you believe you have incurred, including disinfection, cleanup, property damage or loss. These determinations are separate from the Expedited Reimbursement Program. If you have questions, you may call the Law Department between 8:30 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. at 410-396-3400.

To file a claim, you must return a completed, signed claim form to the Law Department as soon as possible, and no later than one (1) year after the event. Facsimile transmission is not acceptable. Claim forms are available online at <https://law.baltimorecity.gov/claims> and upon request. You must include the date, time, and

location of the incident, the cause of any injury or damages, and the names and addresses of any witnesses or other interested persons. Submit copies of all photographs, bills, receipts, estimates, and other documents in support of your claim. Once your claim is received, an investigator will be assigned to your case, and may contact you for further information. Claims are typically evaluated based on a general negligence standard.

You will be notified upon completion of the investigation. The average timetable for general liability claims is up to 180 days, depending on the number of claims and the documentation provided to substantiate the damages alleged.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS:



Send a completed application and all supporting documentation to the DPW Office of Legal and Regulatory Affairs within 90 days:

Baltimore City DPW
Office of Legal and Regulatory Affairs
Abel Wolman Municipal Building
200 Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-396-7755 between
8:30am and 4:30pm
reimbursement@baltimorecity.gov