

Sewer Overflow or Backup Information

A sewer back up can be very frustrating and stressful and it is never pleasant to deal with. Although the City of Northville makes every effort to prevent such incidents, they still may occur. While sewer backups may occur for a number of reasons, they are usually caused by internal plumbing problems in the home or private line (sewer lateral – the line that runs from the home to the street), and in rare cases, the public sewer line. If you experience a sewer back up, the situation must be dealt with in a very careful manner. If not handled properly, health and safety problems can occur, as well as significant property loss.

First Steps if a Sewer Backup Occurs

1. If you discover an overflow or sanitary sewer backup in your home, which does not appear related to an internal plumbing problem, immediately contact the City of Northville Department of Public Works (DPW) at (248) 449-9930 between 8:00 AM and 3:30 PM on weekdays. After business hours, during weekends or on holidays call Northville Community Dispatch non-emergency at (248) 349-1234.
2. A DPW maintenance crew will be dispatched to your address to determine if the blockage is in the City main line or your private line (sewer lateral). If a blockage is found in the city sewer, DPW will perform any cleaning or repair to that line. This work will be done as soon as possible and you will be kept informed about what is being done.
3. If the sewer main is found to be clear, it is the responsibility of the property owner to call a licensed plumber or drain service to correct the problem. The City of Northville and its employees cannot recommend any plumber. Check your Yellow pages, Business White Pages, or www.yellowpages.com. You may want to get more than one estimate from reputable plumbers and check their references. The City does not have the legal authority or obligation to repair a private sewer lead.

Cleaning Up After Floods/Sewer Back Ups

Sewer backup can lead to disease, destruction of your valuables, damage to your house, and the risk of electrocution. Proper responses to sewer backups can greatly minimize losses from negative health effects and property damage. Every backup is unique and will require different responses but there are some universal principles that can be applied to all situations. Prompt cleanup of affected property can help minimize the inconvenience and damage.

Health and Safety Issues Please be aware and keep in mind the risk of potential health and safety problems when addressing the cleanup of your home. Sewage and floodwaters contain bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other hazardous microorganisms, which can cause disease. These “germs” can be transmitted by touching contaminated items or by tracking them into uncontaminated areas on shoes. Children and pets are especially vulnerable. Odors from sewage backups are unpleasant but not harmful. The speedy removal and cleanup of sewer water is very important and necessary.

To protect yourself and your family during cleanup, please follow these guidelines:

- Avoid skin contact with sewer water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered.
- If you should suffer a cut while working in flood or sewer water, contact your physician or the Health Department about receiving a tetanus shot.
- Do not allow children to play in areas contaminated by sewage backup.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.
- Keep contaminated objects, water, and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes, and nose).

- Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating, and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.
- Disinfect all areas and equipment that came into floodwater contact with a solution of 8 tablespoons of liquid chlorine bleach to a gallon of water. This is a very effective method of removing odors and bacteria. Bleach solutions are the most effective disinfectants, but may cause discoloration of many materials.



Do not mix chlorine bleach with ammonia. This combination produces poisonous gas!

The Do's and Don'ts of Clean-up Because of the unsanitary nature of a sewer backup in the home, it is essential that all affected areas where the backup occurred be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible. Generally, small household items that are affected or exposed to the sewage should be discarded. It is important to make a list of discarded items, and if possible, provide photographs for insurance purposes.

All affected appliances should be inspected prior to putting them back into operation. Many private companies can handle the cleanup for you. Check the yellow pages under the listing “**Fire and Water Damage Restoration**” or under www.yellowpages.com. Some companies will also inspect and repair major appliances (furnaces, water heaters, washers and dryers). If a private company is contracted to do cleaning and/or restoration, be sure to keep all receipts for insurance purposes. **The City recommends that you immediately arrange for a thorough, professional, sanitized cleanup of your affected property.**

If you choose to cleanup your property yourself, the following information is provided as a recommendation to assist with your cleanup efforts:

- Potential health and safety hazards must be identified and eliminated prior to implementing cleaning or restoration procedures. Before entering the affected area the potential for electrical shock hazards and gas leaks must be assessed.
- The cleanup and drying of the basement should occur as quickly as possible to minimize mold and risk of problems.
- Wear protective clothing such as rubber boots, gloves and eye protection during cleanup and removal. To remove gloves turn them inside out, without touching the contaminated exterior. Dispose of them properly.
- Treat all water soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as contaminated until properly cleaned & sanitized.
- Do not use any electrical equipment while standing in water.
- Wet-vacuum to remove spillage.
- Operate wet vacuums only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.
- Remove and discard upholstered furniture and porous wood furniture stained by sewage.
- Discard or properly wash and disinfect toys, clothing and other contaminated objects.
- Sanitize and clean hardwood furniture, then thoroughly wipe, dry and apply an oil-based wood polish.
- Ventilate the affected area with floor fans and a dehumidifier, if available, to properly dry the area. If it has not been directly contacted by water, activate the building's heating, ventilation and doors when conditions are favorable.
- Clean appliances and/or ductwork. If electric motors, wiring or insulation have been saturated, have a qualified service technician remove the motor, dry it, and inspect for damage before plugging it back in and turning it on.
- Do not use heat to dry closed building interiors; mildew and expanded water damage may result

- If your basement walls are finished with drywall, all the areas contacted by water must be removed and disposed of within 24 hours. Once these items get wet, they retain moisture long enough to grow mold. Removing the wallboard also allows air to circulate around the wood studs so that they dry completely and will not need to be replaced.
- Sanitize and repair, or remove and discard, paneling, wallboard or wall coverings.
- Unplug all electrical appliances, small electrical devices on wet floor covering or other wet areas and turn off the circuit breakers supplying the electricity to affected areas.
- Turn off the gas (or other fuel source) to your furnace or heater and hot water heater.
- Avoid flushing toilets or using other water connected to appliances or fixtures. The discharge from these items may back up into the basement.
- After the waters have receded, flush out and disinfect plumbing fixtures before resuming normal use.
- Do not track sewage from the basement into living areas of the house.
- Keep children and animals out of the affected area.
- Take before-and-after photos.
- If a dishwasher, washing machine, shower, bathtub, toilet or other water fixture is operating shut it off immediately. Avoid flushing toilets or using other water connected to appliances or fixtures. The discharge from these items may back up into the basement.
- Move any uncontaminated property away from the affected areas.
- Do not attempt to stop the flow of sewer backup through the floor drain or any other sewer drain. Any added obstruction could cause serious damage to your household drainage system and possibly a catastrophic rupture of the household sewer drainage system.

Treatment of Rugs, Carpeting and Drapery For smaller, loose rugs, and wall-to-wall carpet installed on racks, in-plant cleaning is the best option. The germicidal and cleaning treatment has to be thorough. Both the carpet and the floor surface have to be completely cleaned and decontaminated. Germicides used for this have to be effective even against the bacteria of the E-Coli family, which is present in contaminated sewage. For wall-to-wall carpets that are glued down, cleaning on-site may not be completely effect and in-plant cleaning may not be viable economically or practically. Contaminated padding is best discarded and should not be reused. Steam clean or dispose of drapes.

Sewer BackUp Do's and Don'ts

- Do keep your sewer cleanout accessible and be knowledgeable of where your sewer cleanout is located in case of a backup emergency. The cleanout is a pipe located near the property line that rises from your sewer line to about 4" above ground level and is capped. It is often located in a basement, front yard, or back yard. If you do not have a sewer cleanout or your sewer cleanout has become buried, hire a licensed plumber to install a cleanout or raise your existing cleanout.
- Do make sure you are covered for backups with your homeowner's insurance policy. Many homeowner's insurance policies exclude damage resulting from sewer backups. As such, homeowners often end up looking to the municipality to pay their damages when their own homeowner's insurer denies their claim. It is possible for homeowners to protect themselves against this risk. If you are not covered, call your agent for information on costs and coverage options. Most insurance companies offer a rider for water damage or failure of a sump pump and this optional coverage is not usually expensive. However, you must usually request that it be added to your policy.

The City of Northville is not automatically liable for resulting damages whenever a sewer backs up. It cannot assume financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups since most blockages are related to conditions that are beyond the City's control. That is why it is

important that property owners confirm that they are adequately insured, particularly if areas of their home lie below ground level.

- Do save all receipts related to any repair, cleaning or damages if a backup does occur. Also, take a lot of pictures with descriptions of where the damage occurred. This information will be useful when working with your insurance company.
- A sewer system is not a closed system and many things put into the sewer can clog the system. Don't dispose of grease down the drain. Backups are often the result of a grease buildup in the drain. Greasy or oily food waste should be put into a coffee can or other container. Allow animal fats to solidify before scraping the pan or throwing the grease container in the trash.
- Don't flush diapers, sanitary napkins, tampons, paper towels, tissues, or baby wipes down the toilet. Flushing such items can easily cause a blockage in the drain.
- Do contact a plumber or plumbing supply dealer about preventive measures, such as installing a "back-flow valve" on the lowest drain in your home and periodic cleaning of the sewer lateral (private line, which is the line that runs from the home to the street).

What a Home Owner Needs to Know

In 2001, the State of Michigan adopted Public Act 222 of 2001, known as sewer backup legislation. The legislation clarifies when municipalities are liable for sewer backups, sets standards to determine the extent to which a municipality is liable for sewer backups, and established a process to seek compensation when a backup occurs.

Persons making a claim for property damage or physical injury must prove that the public sewer had a defect. In addition, it must be proven that the governmental agency knew, or in the exercise of reasonable diligence, should have known about the defect, and that the governmental agency, having the legal authority to do so, failed to take reasonable steps in a reasonable amount of time to repair, correct, or remedy the defect.

If you experience an overflow or backup of a sewage disposal system or storm water system, you must file a written claim with the City of Northville within 45 days after the overflow or backup is discovered. Notice should be mailed to the City of Northville, Attn: City Clerk, 215 W. Main Street, Northville, Michigan, 48167. Claim forms may be obtained by calling the City of Northville Department of Public Works at 248-449-9930.

When presenting a written claim, you will be required to provide the following items:

1. Copies of receipts for cleaning costs, plumbing bills, or other bills.
2. List of the damaged items and receipts to prove the ages of your items. Reimbursement for the Actual Cash Value of damaged items is the maximum amount payable.
3. Please make an attempt to provide pictures of anything you wish to claim that was damaged due to the sewer backup.

The filing of a claim does not guarantee reimbursement.