

# ATTENTION – WE NEED YOUR HELP!

## North Branford Homeowners & Residents

### - Facts About Sewer Backup Incidents -

Sewer backups are an unfortunate but common problem in U.S. cities and towns. Although municipal departments do their best to prevent such incidents, they still may occur. The following information is offered to help homeowners and residents understand why backups happen, how they can be prevented, and what steps citizens should take if a sewer backup affects their property. The following questions and answers may be helpful:

#### **What causes a sewer backup?**

Sanitary sewer overflows can be caused by a number of factors. They usually involve sewer pipe blockages in either main sewer lines or service laterals (lines between buildings and the main line). Causes may also include pipe breaks or cracks due to tree roots, insufficient system capacity due to residential or commercial growth, or construction mishaps. In home and office plumbing systems, the main cause is accumulation of grease, tree roots, hair, or solid materials, such as disposable diapers or feminine hygiene products that are too large for wastewater pipes to handle. Such materials may cause major backups in Town lines as well as in residents' lateral lines.

#### **How could a sewer backup affect me?**

If the backup occurs in a Town main sewer line, the wastewater will normally 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 is even with the sewer lines—the overflowing wastewater may exit through the home's lower drains and toilets.**

#### **Is there anything I can do to prevent sewage backup into my home?**

- Avoid putting grease down your garbage disposal or household drain. It can solidify, collect debris and accumulate in Town lines, or build up in your own system.
- Never flush disposable diapers, sanitary napkins or paper towels down the toilet. They could stop up your drains and may damage your plumbing system.
- If the lowest level of your home is below ground level, an opening such as a basement floor drain, may one day be affected by a backup. One way to prevent sewage backup through such below ground areas is to install a "back-flow valve" on the lowest drain(s). You can also use a plumber's test plug to close these drains when not in use.
- Contact a plumber or plumbing supply dealer for further information about preventive measures.

#### **What does the Town do to prevent this problem?**

- Routine maintenance is undertaken to prevent backups in the public wastewater system before they occur. Sewer lines are specially designed to prevent accumulation and stoppages.
- In addition, the Town's sanitary sewer system operators inspect and clean wastewater lines throughout the Town on a regular schedule.
- Even with our maintenance schedule, however, backups are often beyond the Town's control. Most that do occur are confined to the sewage pipeline, rather than backing up into a home.

#### **Will insurance cover any damage to my home or property?**

In the majority of cases, a special rider will need to be added to your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy to cover damages related to sewage backups or water damage. This is an optional coverage and you must request that it be added to your policy. You are encouraged to check with your insurance agent about this policy provision and its cost.

As with the majority of municipalities in the country, the Town cannot assume full financial responsibility for damages resulting from sewage backups, since most stoppages are related to conditions that are beyond the Town'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.

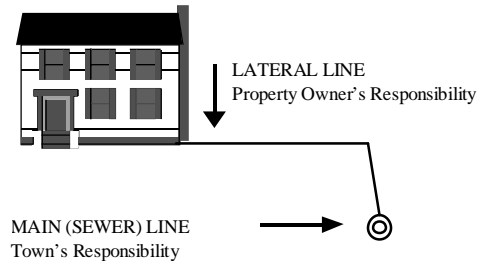
## What should I do if sewage backs up into my home?

First, take action to protect people and valuable property:

- 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. A string mop can be used to help plug toilet openings.
- Do not run any water down your drains until the blockage has been cleared.
- A quick check with nearby neighbors will help determine if the backup appears to be in your neighbor's wastewater line, and/or widespread in your neighborhood. In this case, call the Police Dispatcher immediately. Phone number is listed at the end of this flyer.
- Call a plumber if the problem is in your lateral service line.

## If I call the Town, what will they do about a sewer backup onto my property?

- You will be asked questions about the backup timing, location, the property at risk, etc.
- Town personnel will check for blockages in the main line. If found, the blockage will be immediately cleared.
- If the main line is not blocked, you will be advised to call a plumbing or sewer contractor to check your lateral line. **Maintenance and repair of the lateral line is the owner's responsibility from the house to the main sewer line.** (See diagram below.)
- To minimize damage and negative health effects, you should arrange for cleanup of the property as soon as possible. There are qualified businesses that specialize in this type of cleanup.
- If the sewer backup onto your property resulted from blockage in the main sewer line, Town personnel will explain what the Town can immediately do to help take care of the problem.



## How and where should I report a sewer backup?

Emergency crews are on call 24 hours a day to assist you. In an emergency such as a sewer line backup, or if you observe any vandalism associated with the wastewater or sewer lines, contact:

*Police Dispatcher - Phone Number (203) 484 - 2703*

***IN SUMMARY, PLEASE DO NOT DISPOSE OF GREASE, SOLIDS, DIAPERS AND SIMILAR ITEMS INTO THE SEWER SYSTEM. THEY CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR YOU AND YOUR NEIGHBORS, AND WILL COST YOU MONEY IN POTENTIAL INCREASES TO YOUR ANNUAL SEWER USE FEE DUE TO THE NEED FOR INCREASED SEWER SYSTEM MAINTENANCE.***

**Town of North Branford  
Water Pollution Control Authority**