

Sewage Spill Reference Guide

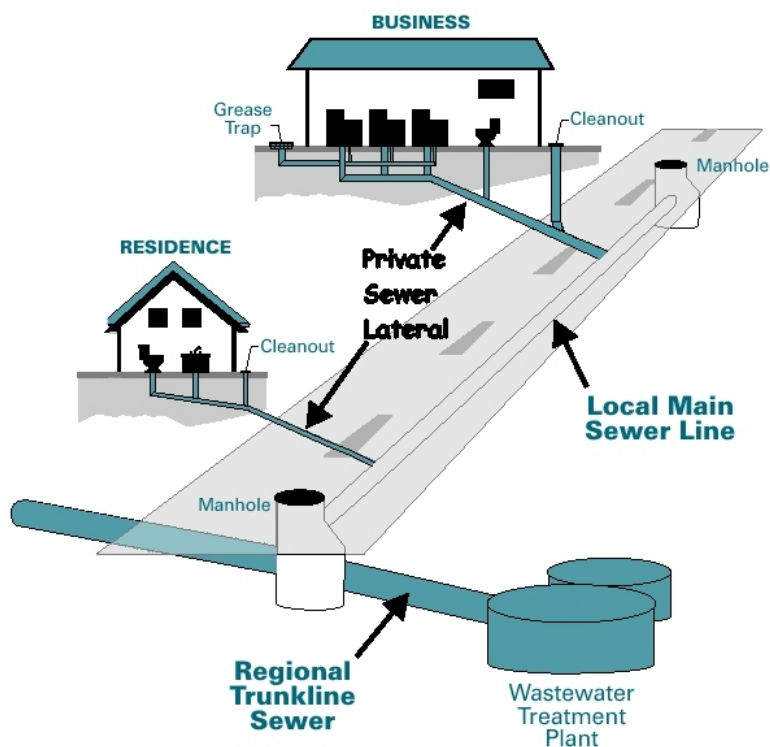
Your Responsibilities as a Private Property Owner

How a Sewer System Works

A typical sanitary sewer system is constructed of a network of pipes, laterals and mains connecting to each building and transporting sewage to a wastewater treatment plant (see diagram to the right).

A property owner's sewer pipe is called a **building sewer or lateral** and connects to a larger city-maintained pipe called a sewer main typically located in the street.

As stated in the El Cajon Municipal Code, **building sewers are the responsibility of the property owner** and must be maintained by the property owner for the entire distance from the building to the sewer main.



What is a Sewage Spill?

Sewage spills occur when the wastewater being transported via underground pipes overflows through a manhole, cleanout, or broken pipe. Sewage spills can cause health hazards, damage to homes and businesses, and threaten the environment, local waterways, and beaches.

Common Causes of Sewage Spills

Grease and **roots** build up inside and eventually block pipelines. Grease gets into the sewer from food establishments, household drains, as well as from poorly maintained commercial grease traps and interceptors. Grease is a common cause of sewer pipe blockages, especially in commercial and industrial areas. Root problems are more common in residential areas.

Large objects such as paper towels, rags, disposable diapers or children's toys can contribute to a blockage.

Structural problems caused by tree roots in the lines, broken or cracked pipes, missing or broken cleanout caps, or undersized sewers can cause blockages. Blockages by roots are a common cause of blockages in residential areas.

Infiltration and inflow impacts pipe capacity and is caused when groundwater or rainwater enters the sewer system through pipe defects and illegal connections.

You Are Responsible for a Sewage Spill Caused by a Blockage or Break in Your Sewer Lines!

Time is of the essence in dealing with sewage spills. You are required to **immediately**:

- ✓ **Control and minimize the spill.** Keep spills contained on private property and out of gutter, storm drains and public waterways by shutting off or not using the water.
- ✓ **Use sandbags, dirt or plastic sheeting** to prevent sewage from entering the storm drain system.
- ✓ **Clear the sewer blockage.** Always wear gloves and wash your hands. It is recommended that a plumbing professional be called for clearing blockages and making necessary repairs.
- ✓ **Notify the El Cajon Department of Public Works** by calling (619) 441-1653 during non-holiday business hours (8am to 5pm, M-F), or call the Police Department Communications Center 24-hour number at (619) 579-3311. City forces can help in containing and capturing the sewer spill, but we need your telephoned notification. The City of El Cajon is currently required by California State Law to report any and all known sewage spills to a State-wide reporting system, regardless of whether they occur on private or public lands.

You May Be Liable

Allowing sewage from your home, business or property to discharge to a gutter or storm drain may subject you to penalties and/or out-of-pocket costs to reimburse our city for clean-up efforts and enforcement actions.

What To Look For

Sewage spills can be a very noticeable gushing of water from a manhole or a slow water leak that may take time to be noticed. Investigate suspicious looking wet areas. Look for:

- ✓ Drain backups inside the building.
- ✓ Wet ground and water leaking around manhole lids on to your street.
- ✓ Leaking water from cleanouts or outside drains.
- ✓ Unusual strong offensive odors from wet areas near sidewalks, external walls, or landscaped areas.
- ✓ Slow draining or clogged sinks and toilets

Be Cautious

Keep people and pets away from the affected area. Untreated sewage has high levels of disease-causing viruses and bacteria.

How You Can Prevent Sewage Spills Before They Happen

- ✓ Never put grease down garbage disposals, drains or toilets.
- ✓ Perform periodic cleaning to eliminate grease, debris and roots in your house plumbing and sewer lateral.
- ✓ Repair any structural problems in your sewer system and eliminate any rainwater infiltration or inflow into your plumbing system.
- ✓ Do not dispose of paper towels, or other large objects in toilets.