

Section 4 – Customer Relations

The Customer Relations section of this guide is designed to assist how you and your staff interact and educate your customers on the Sewer Backups and the prevention of Sewer Backups.

Exhibit 4.1 - Sewer Backup Procedures

Office Representatives: Suggested language as to what to do and say in the event of an alleged sewer backup, including documentation.

Field Representatives: Suggested language as to what to do and say in the event of an alleged sewer backup, including documentation.

Exhibit 4.2 - Reference Guides:

Auto cards are designed to help your field operators communicate with your customers during a loss.

- Working with Property Owner
- Litigation STOPS Direct Communication
- Examples of what you might say

Exhibit 4.3 - Incident Report: This sample report is created to assist your field operators to obtain and document pertinent loss data in the event of an alleged sewer backup.

Customer Education and Sample News Letter Topics: This section is designed to provide educational resources and communication tools to help inform your customers of their responsibilities, hazards, and any updates or projects to the sewer system.

Exhibit 4.4 - Understanding Sewer Backups / Customer Information

Exhibit 4.5 - Fat Oil Grease Clogs Pipes

Exhibit 4.6 - What Not To Flush

Exhibit 4.7 - Not A Trash Can

Exhibit 4.8 - News Letter Samples

- Purpose of a Wastewater Treatment Facility
- How a Treatment Plant Works
- Challenges Facing Treatment Facilities
- Customer Education
- Plant & System Upgrades
- Community Outreach



Customer Relations: Backup Procedures

This is intended to provide guidance and direction to District/Municipality staff in the event that a customer reports experiences and reports a sewer backup on their property. Proper responses to sewer backups can potentially minimize the loss and maintain customer relations. These procedures are designed to help you protect yourself, assist the customer and protect the assets and reputation of the District/Municipality.

District/Municipality should designate a primary contact person or persons that have been trained to properly assist the customer with their unique situation. When District/Municipal personnel are contacted either by phone or in person it is recommended that you follow the below referenced steps:

Office Representatives:

- Remember that the primary goal of the initial conversation is to gather all pertinent and factual information about the event while helping the customer by showing professionalism and empathy.
- Record all information on an Incident Log.
- Provide your name and position.
- Be concerned, courteous and compassionate.
- Secure the:
 - Location address,
 - Person calling,
 - Phone Number, date & time,
 - Scope of the problem and description.
- Do not admit or insinuate fault or responsibility.
- Do not promise to pay, repair or hire outside assistance.
- Recommend that they contact their insurance company immediately to arrange for the initial cleanup. Their insurer should be able to recommend a professional cleaning service. The District/Municipality should not make recommendations.
- Recommend to the caller that they should take proper precautions to minimize the loss.
- Indicate that crews will be out quickly to determine the cause (provide an estimated response time for site inspection).
- Contact the District/Municipal insurer (send claim report as soon as possible).
- Notify any local, state or federal agency as needed or required.

Field Representatives:

The actions taken by field representatives will vary depending on the scope of the event, availability of equipment and the specific facts of the situation.

- Meet the customer and discuss with them that the purpose of the visit is to determine the cause of the loss.
- Remain professional, calm, concerned, courteous and compassionate.
- Document all aspects of the visit. Field Staff should be provided with an Incident Report Form (see sample form):
 - Who you met with Name and Number.
 - What was said to you and by whom.
 - What you said and to whom.
 - Take pictures of the site.
 - Document findings of causation.
- Do not indicate any fault or promise to repair or clean. You can provide contact information for the District/Municipal insurer and advise that they will investigate and make a final decision regarding responsibility based on the facts.
- Recommend that they contact their insurer to mitigate losses.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A SEWER BACKUP

Working with the Property Owner

The primary goal of the initial discussion is to gather facts, determine scope of risks and mitigate loss. Your dedication to customer satisfaction can help protect the District/Municipality. Please remember that every backup is unique and will require different responses but the universal principals below can assist you and the customer in all situations.

Remember, you are representing the District/Municipality . . .

DO

- Be courteous
- Be compassionate
- Be concerned
- Be consistent (fair)

DO NOT

- Admit fault or liability
- Say: "We'll take care of this."
- Promise to pay
- Hire someone to clean
- Work on private lines or property.

Write Down (Refer to Incident Form)

- Who you spoke with
- Time and Date of report
- What happened
- What was said by you and to you
- Extent of observed injuries or damage

Physical Evidence

- Preserve all physical evidence (photos can be helpful)
- Document items impacted by backup

Contacts

- City employee must report sewer backups/incidents to:

- If property owner believes city is responsible they should contact:

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A SEWER BACKUP **Working with the Property Owner**

Litigation STOPS direct communication . . .

If a property owner is suing the city:

- Accept service of summons and complaint
 - Immediately forward a copy of summons and complaint to:
 - District/Municipality Risk Manager - Insurance Representative
 - District/Municipality Attorney
 - Claims Department – MMA Risk Management Services
 - Attorney defending District/Municipality will contact plaintiff or plaintiff's attorney
 - All contact concerning lawsuits should be made through attorney
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WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A SEWER BACKUP **Working with the Property Owner**

Examples of what you might say . . .

- I can see that you are upset. I know that if this happened to me I would probably be upset too.
- I can certainly understand why you might feel the way you do.
- This has probably been an upsetting experience for you, hasn't it?
- I can certainly sympathize with your situation.
- I can see how frustrating this has been for you.

Incident Report Form

Incident Date: _____ Incident Time: _____

Customer Name: _____

Address of Event: _____

Contact Numbers: _____

Witnesses Name & Numbers: _____

Prepared By: _____ Date & Time: _____

Incident Description:

What was said to you and by whom?

What was said by you and to whom?

Findings & Follow-up Actions:

Manhole Inspection Form Completed? Yes No

Understanding Sewer Backups: Customer Information

A sewer line backup can be a stressful experience and we want to provide you with some information and tools to assist you during this difficult time. In the event of a sewer backup it is particularly important to know who to call and what to do. The District/Municipality is here to assist you, and is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. We can be reached by calling (207) --- ---- during regular operating hours. AFTER normal business hours, on weekends, or holidays, you may call the After Hours Emergencies number at (207) --- ---- to report a problem. Please note that Sewer backups have a variety of causes, which is why it is critical for the impacted party to immediately notify the District/Municipality of the backup so that an investigation can be performed on each backup to attempt to determine the cause. This determination will help the District's/Municipality's insurer establish if the homeowner will be offered compensation for damages and cleanup costs. It is important to understand that sewer line mains are the responsibility of the District/Municipality to maintain and repair. The Lateral Line (connection from the private property to the sewer main) and all service line from the main to the home is the responsibility of the property owner. Any sewer line backup or clog from the sewer main to the house will be the responsibility of the property owner. The District/Municipality cannot repair a break or clog if it is on the homeowner side.

In the event of a sewer backup, the homeowner has a duty to protect their property, regardless of the cause of the backup or who pays for it. The homeowner must take reasonable steps to minimize further damage.

The following are some suggested/recommended steps to assist you in the event of a backup:

- (1) Contact the District/Municipality to report a sewer backup.
- (2) You may also wish to contact your homeowner's insurance agent for guidance on submitting a claim to your insurer.
- (3) Take photographs of the backup, both prior to and after the water and sewage are removed.
- (4) All water and sewage should be immediately removed from the basement.
- (5) Remove all wet rugs, clothes, boxes, and other items from the basement area.
- (6) Take pictures and document any damaged property.
- (7) If the water was high enough to involve a motor on a furnace, or electrical appliance, you may want to contact a reputable repair service to remove the motor and have it dried.
- (8) Document any actions you take (calls, contacts, costs) in response to the sewer backup.

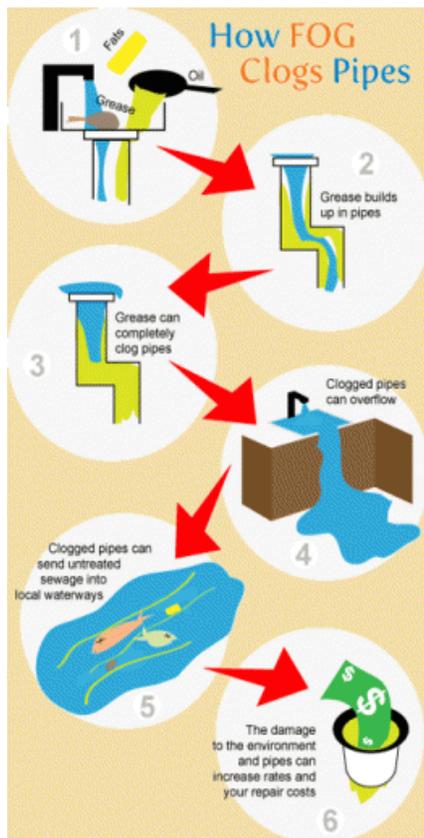
PLEASE NOTE: The above suggestions are meant to assist in the event of a sewer backup, and are not an admission of liability or a commitment to reimburse the homeowner for any costs incurred.

How Fat Oil Grease (FOG) Clogs Pipes

Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG), combined with tree roots in the sewer system, can create massive, cement-like clogs which cause a great number of sewer backups and overflows. When put down the kitchen drain, FOG causes sewer problems that can result in:

- Damage to homes and businesses
- Health and environmental hazards (“Sewer overflows in the street can work their way into storm drains, which go directly to our creeks and streams”)
- Costly repairs
- Increased maintenance for cleaning up messes and replacing pipes

How does FOG create sewer backups and overflows?



Just as fat accumulates and causes blockages in human arteries, oil and grease solidifies and accumulates in household pipes, restricting the flow of wastewater and causing sewer backups and overflows. When poured down the kitchen drain, FOG cools, turns solid, and floats to the top of other liquid in sewer pipes. The FOG layer sticks to the sewer pipes and, over time, blocks sewage flow. It can then cause a sewer backup or overflow.

How it starts: Fats, oils, and grease (FOG) separates from other liquids as it goes down your drain. The FOG cools and sticks to household pipes, commercial pipes and sewer pipes.

A matter of time: Over time, pipes become clogged and sewage flow becomes restricted.

Nowhere to go but back: The clogged pipe eventually backs up and floods your home with wastewater. Or it causes it to overflow onto the street.

A threat to the environment: The untreated wastewater can then flow to local waterways, potentially harming the environment.

The cost to ratepayers: Not only is FOG costly to the environment, it can also be costly to ratepayers, as the expense of repairing clogged pipes may ultimately impact customers’ monthly rates.

What you can do:

Together if we take these steps at home and at work, we can prevent FOG from entering our sewers.

- Never pour Fats, Oils, or Grease down drains or flush down toilets.
- When cooking collect Fats, Oils, or Grease and dispose of them properly in the trash.
- Dispose of food waste by composting or by solid waste removal rather than using a sink disposal system.
- Restaurants and food preparation establishments may wish to contact rendering companies who purchase Fats, Oils or Grease to be used in soaps, fertilizers and feed.

WHAT NOT TO FLUSH



WET WIPES & PAPER TOWELS

Wipes and paper towels are difficult to breakdown and do not disintegrate like toilet paper which clogs our systems.



MEDICATIONS

Help prevent pollution of water sources by the proper disposal of medications



PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS

These items do not breakdown and may buildup in lines causing a costly backup. Please dispose of these items properly in the trash.

FATS, OILS & GREASE

Cooking by-products such as oils and grease from fried food can congeal inside pipes and cause a sewage backup.



PAINTS & CLEANING PRODUCTS

These items may contain harmful chemicals and toxic ingredients which can be harmful to our water. Please take these items to a hazardous waste location.



FOOD WASTE

Place food waste in the trash to avoid a clog.

It's a Toilet, Not a Trash Can!

Never flush the following items (or put down the garbage disposal or drain). Toss them in the trash instead.

- Baby/Facial/Cleaning Wipes
- Tampons
- Sanitary Napkins
- Medication
- Hair
- Dental Floss
- Cotton Swabs/Balls
- Bandages
- Rags and Towels
- Rubber Items (like latex gloves)
- Fat, Cooking Oil, Grease



- Clothing Labels
- Candy/Food Wrappers
- Syringes
- Cigarette Butts
- Disposable Toilet Brushes
- Kitty Litter
- Aquarium Gravel
- Plastic Items
- Diapers
- Fruit Stickers
- Paper Towels

Sample News Letter Article Topics

Purpose of a Wastewater Treatment Facility:

To provide the public service of wastewater treatment of raw wastewater. If raw wastewater were to be released directly into the environment without proper treatment the organic materials could cause rapid bacterial growth in our rivers and streams which can deplete oxygen levels and damage ecosystems. Raw wastewater also contains harmful pathogenic bacteria that can cause disease in humans.

How a Treatment Plant Works:

There are various types of treatment plants. Many treatment plants utilize biological principles that are naturally occurring. Bacteria is used in a controlled manner to biodegrade all of the wastewater organics such that no organic material will remain when the treated water is released back into the environment. Effluent is also disinfected to protect public health.

Challenges Facing Treatment Facilities:

As with many Treatment Facilities in Maine we are facing numerous challenges. These challenges include:

- Aging infrastructure that can be over 100 years of age.
- Increase in usage and an under develop facility.
- Improper waste being flushed into our system including wet wipes, diapers, chemicals, medications and more.
- Federal and State Environmental compliance.

Customer Education:

Sewer backups have a variety of causes, which is why it is critical for the impacted party to immediately notify the District/Municipality of the backup so that an investigation can be perform on each backup to attempt to determine the cause. This determination will help the District's/Municipality's insurer establish if the customer will be offered compensation for damages and cleanup costs. It is important to understand that sewer line mains are the responsibility of the District/Municipality to maintain and repair. The Lateral Line (connection from the private property to the sewer main) and all service line from the main to the customer is the responsibility of the property owner. Any sewer line backup or clog from the sewer main to the house will be the responsibility of the property owner. The District/Municipality cannot repair a break or clog if it is on the customer's side.

Plant & System Upgrades:

- Line repairs
- Cleanings
- Raising of Manholes
- Catch-Basin replacements,
- Computer Upgrades etc....

Community Outreach:

- Education for the Public
- Facility tours
- Environmental impact