



What Causes a Sewer Backup and Basement Flooding?

Service Blockage

By far the most common cause of sewer backup is a blockage of the sanitary service pipe between the home and the city main. This is usually caused by something accidentally flushed down a household drain like a rag, baseball, or piece of cloth. It can also be caused by a problem with the sewer service line like pipe collapse, a settlement, misaligned joint, or root penetration. If you have this type of problem, your floor drain will usually start to back up. Since it is only water from your home which is "backing up" the amount of backup will depend on how much water you are using. Many times if you stop using it the water will slowly flow away, but the problem will likely return when you use more water. If you have this type of blockage, call a plumber. He will advise you how to correct the problem. While most of these types of problems are the property owners' responsibility, sometimes the problem can be city responsibility. If something like a rag is flushed down the service pipe and causes a blockage, the city is not responsible if the blockage occurs out under the street (they didn't cause the blockage, the rag did!), but the city is responsible for problems, like a collapsed service pipe under the street. If the city is responsible your plumber will contact the city after they have confirmed the problem and arrange for a repair. In this case the plumber will charge the city for his services.

Blockages due to Tree Roots



In older areas where 'clay tile' pipe has been used for service piping, tree roots can enter the service pipe at joints and cause blockages. Tree roots can travel a long way, and roots from different types of trees act differently. If city boulevard trees are suspected, your plumber will contact the city, and samples of the roots will be used to help identify the trees. If city boulevard trees are confirmed as the problem, the city will take responsibility for cleaning and may also choose to remove the offending tree or trees. Property owners wishing to retain their boulevard trees must agree to accept responsibility for future service pipe cleaning. Sometimes their blockage is a result of a combination of city and private trees. In this case costs are split between the city and property owner.

Sewer Backup

On rare occasions a blockage can occur in a city sanitary main. If the blockage is not detected in time, sewage from the main can backup into homes through the floor drain. Usually this happens slowly and is very similar to a blockage. If this is the case call you plumber. He will contact the City if he suspects a problem with the city main.

Water in Basement

Most Basement flooding is not related to the Sanitary Sewer system at all. In many cases soil settles adjacent to the house, and if not corrected, leads to rainwater flowing towards the house and running down the outside of the foundation wall. Particularly in older homes (15 years +) cracks may have developed in the foundation or floor slab, which allows this water to enter the basement. The cement floor and basement walls of many older homes may have deteriorated to the point that they are no longer waterproof. Typically, water will show up in a basement that has never had a water problem. This will usually happen after a number of rainstorms, when the ground is saturated. Improved lot drainage away from the house is the first step, and usually significantly improves the problem. Fixing a basement floor or wall that has severely corroded is a major project, usually requiring a foundation specialist.



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