

Do you have a sewer backup problem?

Occasionally, a blockage in a sewer main or sewer service results in backup of sanitary sewage into a private home. If you have experienced a sewer backup, you probably have many questions about what to do next. The following information should provide you with a starting point.

Sewer Backups

The following are indicators of an obstruction in a sewer line:

- Water does not drain out of floor drains below ground level.
- Water comes up in floor drains, showers, or toilets.
- Toilets, showers, or floor drains below ground level drain very slowly.

Insurance

Sometimes, your homeowner's insurance will pay for sewer backups. Not all policies have this coverage, so check with your agent.

Clean Up

For large clean ups, you should call a cleaning service. Your insurance carrier might have suggestions on which service to use or you can look in the Yellow Pages under "Water Damage Restoration" or "House Cleaning." During clean up, protect yourself from contamination by wearing rubber boots, waterproof gloves, and protective garments. Wash your hands thoroughly when the job is done. Those persons whose resistance to infection is compromised are considered to be at greater risks, and should not attempt this type of clean up.

Chemical Disinfection

The process of disinfection is important to ensure the elimination of the pathogens (disease causing bacteria, viruses, and fungi) that are present in raw sewage. Thorough cleaning must take place before disinfection to insure the effectiveness.

TYPE OF DISINFECTANT SUGGESTED STRENGTH
Household Bleach 1:10 - 1:100
(usually 1 oz. to 1 gal. water)
Phenolic (Lysol and other brand name disinfectant products) 0.5 to 5 percent

Remember to follow manufacturer's label instruction and use in areas with adequate ventilation.

The Health Departments have suggested the following:

- Use outside air to dry your home.
- Open windows and doors and use an exhaust fan to remove moist air from the house.
- If available, use a room dehumidifier. Empty it often.
- If your basement is completely flooded, begin pumping the water in stages—about one-third per day. Make sure that the level of the floodwaters is below the level of the basement floor. If so, do not pump the basement all at once because the saturated soil could cause the basement walls to collapse.

- Open, clean, disinfect, and thoroughly dry cavities in walls, floors, and ceilings.
 - Allow walls to dry from the inside out.
 - Remove moisture and debris from all surfaces and dry surface materials within 24 to 48 hours.
 - Release any water or mud that has been trapped in walls, ceilings, or floor cavities.
 - Remove all interior wall finishing materials and insulation.
 - Throw out any wet insulation.
 - Throw out moist plaster, wallboard, and paneling.
- If any materials are still wet or moist after 24 to 48 hours, you should assume they have mold growing on them.

Food Containers

- Throw out any opened food or packaged foods that are not waterproof as well as containers with screw-top lids that have been submerged.
- Commercially-canned foods can be salvaged if the labels are removed and the cans thoroughly washed. The cans should then be disinfected by dipping the can in a household bleach-and-water mixture and rinsed in clear water.

Soiled Clothing or Blankets

- Throw out mattresses and pillows.
- Line-dry all articles before attempting to clean or treat them.
- After drying, brush off loose dirt and debris.
- Send "Dry Clean Only" items to a professional cleaner.
- Wash clothes several times in cold water and laundry detergent. Add a cup of bleach per load of wash.
- Thoroughly dry all items immediately.

Wet Carpeting

- Pull up waterlogged carpet immediately to prevent further floor damage.
- Carpet pads cannot be saved. Remove the pads and throw them away.
- Clean, disinfect, and dry your floors thoroughly before re-carpeting.
- If any attempt is made to restore carpeting or area rugs, extensive cleaning and disinfection will be needed.

Wet Floors or Hardwood

- Remove any moisture and debris.
- Scrub floors and woodwork within 48 hours using a stiff brush, water, detergent, and disinfectant.
- Allow all wood to dry thoroughly.

Wet Furniture

- Discard upholstered furniture if it has been exposed to water or contaminated material.
- Clean, rinse, and disinfect wood furniture.

Wet Appliances

- If your water heater became wet due to flooding, it should be discarded. The insulation typically can't be replaced and the burner or heating element might be damaged and could cause an explosion or fire if used. If in doubt, consult a service professional before using.
- If the furnace was flooded, have it inspected and serviced by a professional furnace service before using.

Stress and Fatigue from Cleanup

Stress, long hours, and fatigue increase the risks for injury and illness. Continued long hours of work, combined with emotional and physical exhaustion and losses from damaged homes can create a highly stressful situation for flood cleanup workers. Workers exposed to these stressful conditions have an increased risk of injury and emotional crisis, and are more vulnerable to stress-induced illnesses and disease.

Emotional support from family members, neighbors, and local mental health professionals can help to prevent more serious stress-related problems in the difficult months ahead.

People working in all phases of flood cleanup can reduce their risks of injury and illness in several ways:

- Set priorities for cleanup tasks and pace the work over several days (or weeks).
- Avoid physical exhaustion.
- Resume a normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible. Get plenty of rest and take frequent rest breaks before exhaustion builds up.
- Take advantage of disaster relief programs and services in your community.
- Be alert to emotional exhaustion or strain. When family members and neighbors are unavailable for emotional support, consult professionals at community health and mental health centers.

Record Keeping

- Take pictures of damages for your records.
- Keep all receipts for all work done.
- Write a description of the extent of damage done.
- Record date and time of occurrence and which sewer areas overflowed—floor drain, lower level toilet, laundry tub, and the like.