



## **COPING WITH SEWER BACKUPS**

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** A sewer backup creates a stressful and emotional situation for the homeowner/renter. In some cases it may cause health and safety concerns as well as significant property loss. A proper response to a sewer backup can greatly minimize property damage and diminish the threat of illness.

The City of Spearfish makes every effort to be responsive to residents' needs and concerns when a sewer backup occurs. The City has a crew whose duty is to inspect, clean and maintain sewers on a daily basis during the months when weather allows. Unfortunately, because a sewer is not a closed system, many things put into the sewer can clog the system. Large amounts of grease from restaurants, disposable (and cloth) diapers, and tree roots are common items that cause problems. While The City has adopted rules prohibiting the discharge of any substance likely to cause a sewer obstruction, and can try to educate the public about the problems they cause, there is really no way we can absolutely prevent this from happening.

Many homeowners' insurance policies exclude damage resulting from sewer backups. However, some insurance companies do provide sewer backup coverage. If you are concerned about the possibility of a sewer backup and want to insure that you are covered, the City of Spearfish urges you to check with your home insurer regarding the availability of sewer backup insurance.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you experience a sewer problem, please call the **City of Spearfish Public Works Department at 642-1333 from 7am-4pm Monday through Friday or the Police Department at 642-1300** after hours and weekends and state that you are reporting a sewer emergency. Backed up sewer lines, line breaks, sewage odors, and overflowing manholes are considered an emergency.

If the problem is in the sewer lateral, the homeowner or business is responsible for correcting the problem. The owner of the property is responsible for maintaining and cleaning the sewer lateral from the building (or home) to the sewer main, including the connection on the sewer main. Locating the lateral is

also the responsibility of the property owner. Several plumbers also have special locating equipment, which will be helpful.

If the problem is in the sewer lateral, whom do you call for help? You will need to call a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service. Please **check your Yellow Pages**; the City cannot make a recommendation. It may be in your best interest to obtain more than one estimate.

REMEMBER TO CALL THE CITY FIRST before calling a plumber. We will check the sewer main and inform you of our findings. If the problem is not in the main line sewer, you will be advised to contact a plumber or sewer/drain cleaning service.

**LATERAL vs. MAIN:** What is a sewer lateral? A sewer lateral or house lateral is the pipe line between the sewer main, usually located in the street, and the building. The sewer lateral is owned and maintained by the property owner including any part, which may extend into the street or public right of way.

More often than not, the cause of a backup in your lateral is from items that the line is not meant to handle, such as kid's toys, underwear, towels, diapers, paper products (other than toilet paper), keys and even false teeth. To avoid flushing these items, remember to close the toilet lid. What you flush down the toilet may not affect you, but it might cause problems for your neighbors! Another possible cause would be roots in your lateral. The lateral is the responsibility of the owner of the property from the house to the street.

### **WAYS TO PREVENT BACKUPS IN YOUR LATERAL AND THE MAIN LINE**

**SEWER:** The property owner can do many things to prevent the lateral from backing up. Remember too, that the very same things can help to prevent backups in the sewer main as well. If everyone would be careful about how they dispose of certain products, our systems would be a great deal more efficient, cause fewer backups, cost us all less money, and prevent a lot of misery.

**Grease:** Cooking oil should be poured into a heat-resistant container and disposed of, after it cools off, in the garbage, not the drain. Some people assume that washing grease down the drain with hot water is satisfactory. This grease goes down the drain, cools off, and solidifies either in the drain, the property owner's line, or in the main sewer. When this happens, the line constricts, and eventually clogs.

**Paper Products:** Paper towels, disposable and cloth diapers and feminine products cause a great deal of problems in the property owner's lateral as well as in the sewer main. These products do not deteriorate quickly, as does bathroom tissue. They become lodged in portions of the lateral/main, causing a sewer backup. These products should also be disposed of in the garbage.