

### **Flush it and forget it?**

We live busy lives, and even if our lives are not so busy, chances are we don't spend a lot of time thinking about sewers - if we think about them at all. It may seem silly but, for a moment, I'd like you to **think about sewers**, because

### **What you don't know can hurt you.**

It's hard to imagine anything more distressing than waking up to find that raw sewage has entered your basement. You wonder what to do, how it happened and how it might have been prevented. Suddenly "sewage" is no longer an abstract term.

### **What is a Sewer Back-up?**

When a sewer line is restricted or plugged the flow of sewage behind the plug has nowhere to go. As the flow continues, the sewage will take the path of least resistance. Under certain conditions, if you have not taken precautions to prevent it, that path of least resistance can lead into your basement.

### **What causes the Sewer to back up?**

When your kitchen or bathroom sink begins to drain slowly the cause is usually a build up of waste material in the sink trap. You apply some "Liquid Plumber" and, with a little persuasion from a plumber's helper, the problem is solved.

What happened in your sink can also happen in your building drain. When it

does, it is more difficult to deal with. The building drain, or sewer lateral, is the large pipe that collects the wastewater from all of your sinks, toilets, tubs and showers. It takes the wastewater through your basement wall, or in many cases, under the basement floor, and connects to the municipal sanitary sewer line. In the Village of Akron, as in most municipalities, you, the property owner, are responsible for the maintenance of your lateral line - all the way to the point at which it connects to the municipal sewer line. The municipal sewer line is usually, but not always, located in or near the street in front of your home or business. Sewer laterals become plugged in the same way and with the same material as your sink drain. Additionally, especially in older homes, the sewer lateral may have deteriorated and broken or collapsed. It may have settled and shifted out of position, over time, allowing soils and stones to enter the line and plug it. We all love the grand old trees that line many of our streets but tree roots invade sewer laterals and contribute to plugging and consequent back-ups. When your sewer lateral plugs up, the wastewater produced in your home cannot get to the municipal sewer and so it takes the path of least resistance, usually spilling out at the lowest point in your system. This means, for example, that water from the shower drain on the first floor may cause the laundry tub in the basement to fill with wastewater.

What happened in your sink and your sewer lateral can also happen, on a larger scale, in the municipal sewer line. The cause may be tree roots or other material that someone thoughtlessly flushes or otherwise introduces into the sanitary sewer. One item gets stuck, other materials build up against it and, before long, a whole neighborhood is having sewer problems. Quantities of grease sometimes contribute to the problem, as do sawdust, floor sweepings, rags, children's toys and so-called "flushable" items such as baby diapers.

### **What do I do?**

When only one of your drains seems to be affected, the problem is usually a plugged trap. Most homeowners choose to handle this kind of problem themselves. If you do not feel confident tackling the plugged drain yourself, a plumber can do it for you. The Village Office at 21 Main Street has a list of plumbers licensed to work in the Village. If all the drains in your home seem to be plugged, but your neighbors **are not** having a similar problem, your sewer lateral is probably plugged. A blocked lateral almost always requires the help of a plumber.

If all of your drains seem plugged or if they seem slow to drain and if your neighbors **are** having similar problems, the main municipal sewer line may be restricted or plugged. Immediately call **542-2680**, the 24-hour emergency line at the Department of Public Works.

Additionally, if you have illegal drains or unprotected connections to the sanitary sewer in your basement, move immediately to close or plug those connections, as best you can, and get possessions that may be ruined off of the basement floor.

### **Preventing Sewer back-ups**

It is very risky to have connections to the sanitary sewer below grade without some sort of backwater protection. This means that when a floor drain, shower, toilet or even a laundry tub is located in your basement, it can, and often does, become a pathway allowing sewage to enter your basement.

Of course the best way to insure that you never have to worry about sewage backing up into your basement is to have no connections to the sanitary sewer below grade. This is our recommendation and, for new construction in the Village, it is the requirement of the Sewer Law.

However, if you have an older home and have chosen to have connections to the sanitary sewer in the basement of your home, you should know that **basement floor drains, connected to the sanitary sewer, are a violation of the Village's Sewer Law**. They should be plugged immediately. This applies even if the drains were in the home before you bought it. This is very important to you because most insurance will not cover damage that comes about as a result of non-compliance with the law.

If you have other fixtures in your basement, perhaps a bathroom or a laundry room, it is possible to protect yourself against sewer back-ups. Installing a lift pump system, which would raise the discharge line to a level above grade before returning it to your sewer lateral, is one way. Another option may be to install a backwater valve. A backwater valve is designed to allow flow in only one direction. A plumber can advise you about what method is best in your situation. It is important to be aware that the installation of either of these devices will not prevent the problems associated with a plugged lateral. Remember that all mechanical devices require maintenance and failing to maintain a device such as a backwater valve is the same as not having one at all.

For older homes, even if you have never had a problem with your sewer lateral, it may make sense to use a chemical drain cleaner periodically. If there are trees in the area of your sewer lateral, a root treatment may be appropriate. Your plumber or home improvement center can advise you about the best product to use in your situation. The modest cost of this kind of preventative maintenance is far better than trying to get a plumber in the middle of the night.

The Village has an on-going treatment program for tree roots in municipal Sewer lines. However, there are no preventative measures that can be taken

to guard against things like junk mail, kitty litter, pens, pencils, coat hangers, clothing and other amazing items too numerous to list here that have caused sewer problems in the Village. Many of the things that cause serious sewer problems belong in the trash, not the sewer.

Thanks for **thinking about sewers** for a few minutes. With your cooperation, we hope to be able to reduce the number of back-ups.

**If you have questions**

We realize that every question you have may not be answered in this short brochure. Please call us at 542-2680 if you have any additional questions and we will be glad to answer them for you.

**Remember** ...if the Village is called after working hours or on a weekend or a holiday, and the backup problem is in the lateral and not the Village main, the owner will be charged a fee of \$75.00 for the call out of the Village employee.



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542-2680  
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**Village of Akron**



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# Help!

## There's SEWAGE



## In My Basement!

Information to help you  
understand and prevent  
Sewer back-ups

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