



Standard Procedure for Clearing Sanitary Sewer Back-ups and Overflows

Background:

Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources (DWR) maintains all of the sewer mains in the County and the short pieces of pipe called “service stubs” extending from the main lines to the customers’ connections. A service stub is typically a 6-inch diameter pipe that connects the public sewer system and the privately-owned and maintained sewer service lateral. The privately-owned sewer service lateral is an individual customer service line which transports wastewater from one or more buildings to a utility-owned sewer. The privately-owned sewer service lateral is typically a 4-inch diameter pipe that runs from the end of the 6-inch service stub to the home or business being served and includes the 4-inch to 6-inch connection that joins the two pipes. Gwinnett County codes require the sewer lateral to include a vertical section of pipe called a “clean-out” to connect the sewer service stub to the ground surface just inside the right-of-way or easement. The clean-out is required to be capped. Some sewer service laterals may have the clean-out near the structure or more than one clean-out, but DWR can only use a clean-out in the right-of-way or in an easement to perform cleaning or maintenance.

Sewer mains are commonly located under the street or, when sewers cross private property, within an easement. When the sewer main is under a street, the service stub usually extends to just beyond the right-of-way. When the sewer main is in an easement, the service stub usually extends to just beyond the edge of the easement on the side adjacent to the building being served. DWR only maintains sewer mains and service stubs which are within County rights-of-way or within easements dedicated for sewer use. The owner is responsible for the maintenance of all plumbing within their structure and all parts of their sewer service lateral to the limits of the right-of-way or easement. If the 4-inch to 6-inch connection is outside of the right-of-way or easement, the owner is also responsible for maintaining the connection.

Procedure:

DWR considers all notifications of sewer blockages or back-ups as emergencies and will dispatch an investigator to the site in response to a call from a homeowner reporting a sewer back-up. DWR will respond to a notification of sewer back-up 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, including holidays. If a back-up occurs, DWR recommends that the owner discontinue any high discharge water use such as washing machines, dishwashers, or showers until the back-up is cleared.

Upon arrival at the site, the investigator will inspect the sewer main by checking the flow in the manhole both upstream and downstream of the property.

1. If there is a blockage in the sewer main:

- The investigator will call a hydrojet to clean the sewer main to restore normal flow.
- The investigator or crew will then check the flow in the sewer service lateral by looking through the clean-out if it is located at the right-of-way. On commercial properties, the test manhole serves the same function as a clean-out installed at the right-of-way with respect to investigating and clearing back-ups.

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- If the lateral has resumed flowing, a work order will be entered to have the sewer main CCTVed within a few days to determine if there are any structural issues with the pipe or if additional maintenance needed.
- 2. If no blockage is found in the sewer main and there is a clean-out installed at the right-of-way:**
- The investigator will look into the clean-out located at the right-of-way.
 - If the service stub is dry at the clean-out but there is still a back-up inside the building, then the blockage is considered to be in the owner's part of the lateral or within the building itself. The investigator will inform the owner of their findings verbally or through a hand-out left at the property's entrance if the owner is not present, but no additional work will be performed by County staff in this situation.
 - If the service stub is backed up at the clean-out, the investigator will call a hydrojet to attempt to clear the service stub between the clean-out located at the right-of-way and the sewer main.
 - If the service stub is backed up and the crew cannot successfully clear the service stub between the clean-out located at the right-of-way and the sewer main, a pipe repair crew will be called to excavate the service stub in the right-of-way to find and remove the defective or obstructed sections.
- 3. If there is no blockage in the sewer main and there is no clean-out located at the right-of-way or easement:**
- Historically over 70% of the back-ups reported to DWR are found to be located in the privately-maintained section of the lateral and are the owner's responsibility to address. The most common cause is roots entering at the 4-inch to 6-inch connection.
 - If the investigator is unable to determine the cause or location of the blockage using other means; or if the investigator determines that a cleanout is required to definitively determine the location of the blockage and therefore the responsibility to repair the blockage; then at the request of the property owner, DWR will schedule the installation of a clean-out at the right-of-way to allow for the above inspections and activities. The installation of the clean-out will be at the County's expense.
 - Because clean-out installations are considered urgent but not emergency work, these installations are typically performed within 2 to 5 business days following the receipt of the installation request. Emergency work at other locations may be given priority status over such installations which could cause the installation of the clean-out to be delayed.
 - DWR will not restore any landscaping, flowers, or other improvements that are damaged or removed during the installation of the clean-out. Trees or shrubs located too close to the clean-out may also be removed and will not be replaced. The disturbed area will only be restored with ground cover to match the surrounding area using either grass seed and mulch or sod. Watering and care for the disturbed area after the work is complete is the owner's

responsibility. No claims for reimbursement based on additional landscaping or removed trees or shrubs will be considered.

- If after the clean-out has been installed the blockage still exists or if the blockage is determined to be outside of the right-of-way, the homeowner will then be responsible for clearing the blockage in their privately-maintained service lateral.
- If the parcel owner installs a clean-out on their lateral at the right-of-way as part of other work, or if they hire a plumber to accelerate the installation scheduled by DWR, they will be responsible for all costs associated with that work.
 - If the plumber finds that the back-up was caused by an obstruction that was located completely and wholly in the County-maintained section of the service stub, the owner may submit an application for reimbursement of the plumber's fees associated with clearing the line. This application must comply with the County's policies regarding appropriate documentation.
- 4. The property owner is responsible for any and all repair costs associated with damage to the public sewer system that is the result of any foreign objects or materials that are released into the sewer system from their premises or the sewer lateral along the length of the privately-owned section including roots growing into the lateral.
- 5. DWR will not perform any work outside of the right-of-way or easement to restore service in the privately-maintained section of the sewer lateral.
- 6. DWR does not provide recommendations or approvals regarding plumbers servicing privately-owned sewer service laterals. Plumbers/contractors that are hired by the owner shall not cut or otherwise excavate into the right-of-way.

If the owner hires a plumber to clear a back-up on their service lateral and the back-up is found to be caused by defects or obstructions located completely and wholly in the County-owned portion of the lateral, DWR will process and submit a claim to Risk Management on behalf of the owner for review. DWR staff must visually inspect the owner's lateral following excavation but prior to repair if the owner seeks to submit a claim for reimbursement. The owner shall contact DWR so that this inspection can occur. They should allow a minimum of 2 to 3 hours for DWR staff to arrive at the site of the work.

Please submit the following in order to file a claim:

1. Loss location - address of incident
2. Property owner name, mailing address and phone number(s)
3. Resident name, mailing address and phone number(s), if different from owner
4. Date and time of incident(s)
5. A brief statement of what took place and nature of claim
6. A description of loss/damage
7. A copy of the bills incurred
8. Pictures, if available.

All of this information should be e-mailed to: Kathryn.Gable@gwinnettcountry.com

The information may also be faxed to 678-376-6930 or mailed to:

Gwinnett County DWR
684 Winder Hwy
Lawrenceville, GA 30045
Attn: Kathryn Gable

Once the information is submitted, DWR will forward it along with the claim to Risk Management for processing. Risk Management will review the claim information and make the determination on County responsibility.

No claim can be processed for review without the above information. Additional information may be required depending on the nature of the obstruction and quality of the submitted information. The owner should maintain a copy of the submitted information.

Limitations:

No reimbursement will be considered for the cost of installing a clean-out at the right-of-way by a plumber unless agreed to in advance by DWR. Gwinnett County reserves the right to limit the reimbursement of excavation costs, labor, equipment, or materials if the submitted invoices exceed the reasonable or customary costs of similar services rendered by others in Gwinnett County.

If a property is impacted by a sewer back-up and the lowest finished floor elevation of the home is found to be lower than the rim elevation of the sewer manhole on the upstream side of the property, the owner is required to demonstrate that the property's lateral was protected by an appropriate and functioning backflow prevention device at the time of the back-up as part of any claim to DWR for reimbursement of any property damages.

Reimbursement of costs to the owner by Gwinnett County should not be construed as, or interpreted to represent, an admission of liability for additional expenses or damages to property.

For additional information, please contact the Department of Water Resources at **678-376-7000**, or visit the DWR website at **www.Gwinnetth2o.com**.

