WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A SEWER BACKUP

It is never pleasant to deal with a sewer backup. Proper response to a sewer backup can minimize losses, property damage and negative health effects. Every backup is unique and will require different responses but there are some universal practices that can be applied to all situations.

The information contained in this brochure can help protect you and your family from the hazards of raw sewage in your home and provide you practical methods for proper sanitation of your home and its contents if a backup occurs. A quick response will go a long way toward limiting the possibility of long term health effects and property damage.

Health and Safety Issues

Please be aware and keep in mind the risk of potential health and safety problems when addressing the cleanup of your home. Sewage contains bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other hazardous micro-organisms which can cause disease. These "germs" can be transmitted by touching contaminated items or by tracking them into uncontaminated areas on shoes. Children and pets are especially vulnerable. Odors from sewage backups are unpleasant but not harmful. The speedy removal and cleanup of sewer water is very important and necessary.

To protect yourself and your family during cleanup, please follow these guidelines:

- Stay out of areas flooded with sewage. Entering a flooded area creates a risk for accidental electric shock and excessive exposure to disease-causing contaminants. Do not allow children to play in areas contaminated by a sewage backup.
- Evacuate if necessary. If the backup cannot be isolated, then young children, older adults, or anyone suffering from respiratory ailments or weakened immune systems should leave the premises.
- To prevent accidental electrical shock, turn off circuit breakers and unplug electrical appliances in affected areas.
- Stop using plumbing and appliances that drain into the sewer system, including sinks, showers, toilets, dishwashers and laundry machines.
- Avoid direct contact with sewage and sewage contaminated items, if possible. Wear rubber gloves and boots when in the vicinity of the backup. Wash hands thoroughly after handling any contaminated items.
- Turn off forced air furnaces and air conditioners if the duct work has sewage water in it.
- Be careful not to track contamination into other parts of the residence.
- Avoid skin contact with sewer water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered. If you should suffer a cut while working in sewer water, contact your physician or the Health Department about receiving a tetanus shot.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.
- Keep contaminated objects, water, and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes, and nose).
- Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating, and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.

Cleaning Up After a Sewer Backup

In the event of a sewer backup into your home or business, it is important to begin clean up of as soon as possible to minimize any health risks. If the backup is confined to a small area (i.e. bathroom), then clean up can be performed by the property owner. Larger backups, however, should be cleaned by contacting a professional cleaning service. Professional cleaning services can be found in the yellow pages under Water Damage Restoration or your insurance agent may be able to assist you in hiring a professional cleaning service.

If you choose to clean up the backup yourself, you should:

- Move any uncontaminated property away from the affected areas.
- Treat all water soaked surfaces, furnishings and items as contaminated until properly cleaned & sanitized.
- Disinfect all mops, sponges and brushes. Launder clothes worn during cleaning separately from other laundry.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces. Plumbing fixtures and vinyl, metal, wood and concrete surfaces should be cleaned thoroughly with hot water and mild detergent, such as dish detergent, and then disinfected with a bleach solution. (Mix one part of liquid household bleach with 10 parts water) **Warning:** Bleach solutions may cause discoloration of many materials.
- Remove and discard porous materials. Upholstered furniture, loose rugs and drapery that can not be thoroughly decontaminated must be discarded properly.
- Wall to wall carpeting and pad cannot be reliably disinfected, and must be removed and sent to a sanitary landfill.

- Unplug all electrical appliances, small electrical devices on wet floor covering or other wet areas and turn off the circuit breakers supplying electricity to affected areas. Do not use any electrical equipment while standing in water.

- Wet-vacuum to remove spillage. Operate wet vacuums only when plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter or ground fault equipped outlet.

- Discard or properly wash and disinfect toys, clothing and other contaminated objects.

- Sanitize and clean hardwood furniture, then thoroughly wipe, dry and apply an oil-based wood polish.

- Ventilate the affected area with floor fans and a dehumidifier, if available, to properly dry the area. If it has not been directly contacted by sewer water, activate the building's heating, ventilation and/or doors and windows when conditions are favorable.

- Clean appliances and/or ductwork. If electric motors, wiring or insulation have been saturated, have a qualified service technician remove the motor, dry it, and inspect for damage before plugging it back in and turning it on.

- Do not use heat to dry closed building interiors; mildew and expanded water damage may result.

- If your home's walls are finished with drywall, all the areas contacted by water must be removed and disposed of within 24 hours. Once these items get wet, they retain moisture long enough to grow mold. Remove and replace lath, plaster, plasterboard and drywall saturated to the point of being soft to the touch. (Removing the wall board also allows air to circulate around the wood studs so that they dry completely and will not need to be replaced.)

- After the waters have receded, flush out and disinfect plumbing fixtures before resuming normal use.

- All affected appliances should be inspected prior to putting them back into operation.

Treatment of Rugs and Carpeting

For smaller, loose rugs, and wall-to-wall carpet installed on tacks, in-plant cleaning is the best option. Both the carpet and the floor surface have to be completely cleaned and decontaminated. For wall-to-wall carpets that are glued down, cleaning on-site may not be completely effective and in-plant cleaning may not be viable economically or practically. Contaminated padding is best discarded and should not be reused.

Recordkeeping

- Take several photos before and after cleanup. Take photos even if you have also taken video.

- Take photos of anything that is going to be thrown away.

- Create a list of all damaged items, including those that need to be thrown away.

- Keep receipts for all cleaning materials you purchase, any items you had to immediately replace, and/or for any services provided by contractors.

- Do not throw anything away without claims adjuster knowledge. Some things you think may be unsalvageable, can be cleaned and sanitized and may not be covered if you discard it.

Who Pays for the Damage?

Property owners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of all lateral lines (from the home/building to the City's right of way or main line). If an obstruction occurs on the property owner's portion of the line, the property owner is responsible for all resulting damage.

The City is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the main line. The City has very few sewer backups as a result of its maintenance program; however, if an obstruction occurs on the City's main line, the City is responsible if it is negligent in maintaining the main system lines. Sewer backups caused by heavy rains, heavy snow melts, vandalism, or individuals dumping illegal or inappropriate materials into the system are likely not covered by the City's insurance.

Call your insurance agent as soon as possible. Some homeowner's policies provide coverage for sewer backups. However, many homeowners policies do NOT cover sewer or basement drain back ups. In most cases, additional coverage is needed by purchasing an endorsement to the policy to cover sewer backups. Contact your insurance agent for more information on adding this coverage to your policy.

Filing a Claim

If you would like to file a claim with the city for damages caused by a sewer backup, you will need to complete a "Claim for Damages Form", which you can obtain from the City's Risk Manager located at 1321 S. Market Blvd or by phone at 360.345.3222.

When the City receives a completed claim form, the City and/or their insurance adjuster will conduct an investigation. A decision will be made when all of the information has been reviewed. You will be advised as quickly as possible. Please do not delay cleaning up while you wait for insurance information. Delay can often result in more damage occurring. Take lots of pictures and keep track of all your expenses.

After Hours Emergency Number
360.740.1105

CITY OF CHEHALIS
Public Works Department
Wastewater Division
2007 N.E. Kresky Ave.
Chehalis, WA 98532
360.740.7536