

City of Monroe

Water Resources Department

Questions & Answers about “Sewer Blockages”

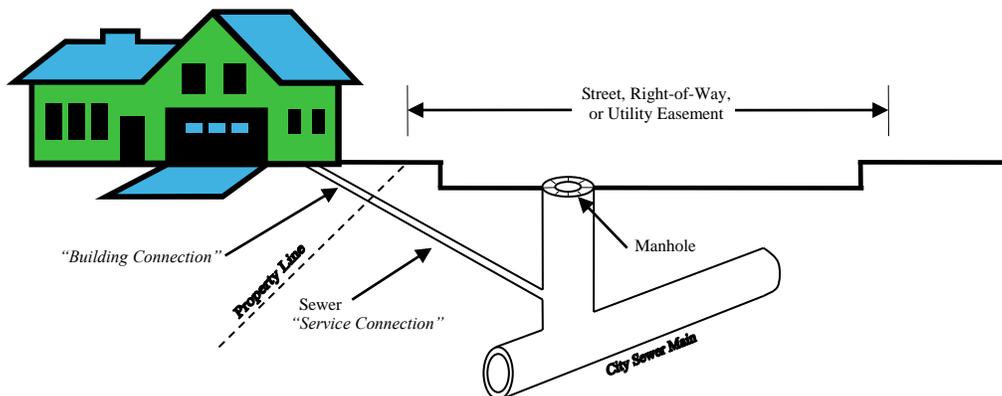
The following are answers to commonly asked questions about blockages that occur in the sanitary sewer system.

What is meant by the term “Sanitary Sewer System”?

The sanitary sewer system, or wastewater system, is the collection of pipes, pumps, and manholes that collect and transport sewer from homes, businesses and industries to the City’s wastewater treatment plant. This is a separate system from the storm water sewer system that transports rainfall runoff from streets and parking lots.

Where do the customers sewer pipes end, and the City’s sanitary sewer system begin?

The City’s sewer system (mainlines and manholes) are typically located in the public right of ways, streets, or in public utility easements. The “service connection” or sewer lateral for each customer is the pipe that extends from the City main or manhole to the property line of the customer. This service connection pipe is installed and maintained by the City at the customer’s expense. The customers “building connection” pipe is installed by the home builder and extends from the service connection at the property line to the building or home being served. The diagram below illustrates these items.



What are the typical causes of sewer blockages?

The most common causes of sewer blockages are structural damage to pipes, grease accumulation, or roots that have penetrated through cracks or joints in the sewer lines. Heavy rainfall can also be a cause of sewer blockages.

Who is responsible when a sewer blockage occurs?

The City is responsible for maintaining the sewer system mainlines and manholes located in the public right of ways, streets, or in public utility easements. If a sewer blockage occurs in these lines, the City will respond to correct it. Property owners and customers are responsible for maintaining “an open flow path from the building sewer connection, through the sewer service connection, to the sewer main line or terminal manhole” as defined in the City’s Sewer Use Ordinance.

Who can I call if I have a sewer blockage?

If you suspect the blockage is on the city’s system, call 282-4601 to report it, 24 hours a day. If you suspect the blockage is on the customer building connection piping or sewer service connection, you will need to call a plumber to open this flow path and clear the blockage. Consult the yellow pages for a qualified plumber in your area.

Will sewer back up into my house if there is a blockage on the City's system?

No, not if the building sewer connection meets all building code requirements and is properly maintained. Every home or business that has plumbing fixtures below the elevation of the closest city manhole must have a "backwater" control valve on their building connection pipe. This is required by both North Carolina Building Code and the City's Sewer Use Ordinance. A backwater control valve is a flapper or check valve that will allow sewer to pass from the building to the City sewer system, but not in reverse. If a backwater valve is properly installed and maintained, it will prevent sewer from backing up in a home or business if a blockage occurs on the City system.

How can I protect my property from sewer backups?

Have your backwater valve checked by a licensed plumber on a regular basis. Install a backwater valve if you do not have one and any of your plumbing fixtures are below the elevation of the City manholes near your property. A good rule of thumb is if your home or business floor level is lower than the street, you may need a backwater valve to comply with Building Code. Also, never dispose of improper items or material down sinks, tubs and toilets. Always dispose of cooking grease in your regular solid waste trash container.

What is the City doing to prevent sewer blockages?

The City of Monroe operates its sanitary sewer collection system in compliance with North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) requirements. The City is proactive in meeting the requirements of the DENR Collection System Permit and exhibits reasonable care in preventing sanitary sewer blockages in the City's system.

This includes a comprehensive maintenance program of sewer cleaning, inspection, and rehabilitation.

What if I want to file a property damage claim?

Contact the City of Monroe Safety and Risk Coordinator at 704-282-4597 concerning filing a property damage claim.

What is a "Sewer Cleanout" and what should I do if the cleanout cap is broken?



The sewer cleanout is a white piece of plastic pipe with a threaded cap that sticks up from the ground. It provides an access point for plumbers to remove a sewer blockage that occurs in the building connection pipe.

If the cap is cracked or broken you should immediately buy a replacement cap at your local hardware store and replace it. Broken cleanout caps allow debris and/or rainwater to enter the sewer system which can cause problems for the homeowner and for the City of Monroe.

