

Wastewater Back-ups Into Basements

At times, the Swatara Township Sewer Authority sanitary sewer system experiences hydraulic overload during extreme wet weather events when unwanted rainwater or groundwater enters the sewage collection system. This excess flow can enter the system through numerous sources: broken sewer mains, root intrusion, homeowner broken lateral pipes, illegal floor drains, and in some cases illegal down spouts. To try to minimize this from happening, flows are monitored in the sanitary sewer mains looking for any source of the unwanted water, referred to as “Inflow/Infiltration” (I/I). This is a challenging job and is very time consuming; as certain wet weather conditions must exist before problems can be located. Once problem areas are located, the necessary repairs must be budgeted for so that sufficient funds are available for the repairs. This is an ongoing battle, which depends on weather conditions and could take years to remedy. In the mean time, you can take a few simple steps that will bring benefits to all the users of the system.

The first would be for you, the homeowner, to disconnect your floor drains, sump pumps, etc. from the sanitary sewer, preventing clear water from entering the sewer system. Talk to neighbors who might not have the back-up conditions but are contributing to the excessive flow problems. Ask for their help in alleviating the condition by making sure that only sanitary sewage flows enter the collection system.

Second, you can install a “Backwater Valve,” which is a backflow prevention device that provides a physical barrier to sewage backflowing into a home. Backflow is a condition where the contents of the piping flow in a direction opposite of the intended direction into a fixture or basement. A backflow/backwater valve is a device or valve installed in the house drain or sewer pipe where a sewer is subject to backflow. It prevents drainage or waste from backing up into a lower level or fixture and causing a flooding condition. A backflow/backwater valve should be installed whenever plumbing fixtures are installed at an elevation lower than the elevation of the nearest manhole cover of the public sewer system, which is dependent on grade of the surrounding area. When installed, backflow/backwater valves must be easily accessible for maintenance purposes. The valve should have noncorrosive bearings, seats and self-aligning discs, and should be constructed to ensure a positive mechanical seal. Contact the Swatara Township Authority Collection System Department for details and recommendations.

Equally as important as the above, is to notify Sewer Authority personnel anytime you get a sewage backup in your home. Backup situations are tracked closely and you will be placed on a notification list that hopefully will give you some warning prior to another possible backup.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this matter, please contact the Swatara Township Authority Collection System Department at 566-3361 ext. 108.