

St. Joseph, Missouri Water Protection

Our
Water ...
Our
Future



PROTECTING THE MIGHTY
MISSOURI
ST. JOSEPH, MO



Homeowners Guide to Your Sewer

Out of Sight, Out of Mind:
Don't wait until you have a problem to maintain
your private lateral sewer line.

Keeping Excess Water Out of the Sanitary Sewer System

In an effort to reduce the impacts of sewer system overflows and keep our streams, lakes and rivers healthy, the City of St. Joseph, Missouri has invested millions of dollars to repair sewers and control overflows now and in the future. The City can't do it alone. You can help protect St. Joseph's waterways and protect your property.

Your Sewer Responsibility

St. Joseph property owners share ownership of the sewer system with the City. The **private lateral sewer line**, the part of the sewer that runs from your house to the City's sewer main INCLUDING the tap connection at the main, is your responsibility. As a property owner, you need to make sure your part of the sewer system continues to function correctly and that you don't contribute to sewer problems.

The purpose of this guide is to help you care for your private lateral sewer line and keep it working properly.

It is your responsibility to properly maintain your lateral sewer line. This includes:

- ◆ keeping the lateral sewer line unblocked and free of debris,
- ◆ repairing broken or collapsed portions of the lateral sewer line located on your property,
- ◆ making sure your downspouts, sump pumps, and area drains are not connected to the lateral sewer line.

Why is it important to maintain the private lateral sewer line?

Maintaining your lateral sewer line makes your property less likely to have untreated sewage back up into your property and your neighbor's property.

Lateral sewer lines that are well-maintained have the following benefits for property owners:

- ◆ saves money,
- ◆ preserves property values,
- ◆ reduces health risks,
- ◆ avoids the inconvenience of a blocked system and basement back-ups,
- ◆ protects the environment.

Keeping excess water out of the system with a properly maintained lateral sewer line will help St. Joseph meet federal and state regulations and improve water quality.



Clean and Clear Sewer Lines

Since you are responsible for your property's lateral sewer line, you should pay attention to what goes down your drains. It's okay for wastewater from your toilets, sinks, showers, and washing machines to travel through your lateral sewer line to the public (or mainline) sewer system, which carries it to the wastewater treatment plant to be treated. However, problems can start if anything in addition to the wastewater is getting into the lines.

What should you keep out of your lateral sewer line?

Blocks in lateral sewer lines can be caused by excessive build up of materials that take a long time to decompose. Blockages and the materials that cause blockages reduce the flow of wastewater through the sewer system, sometimes causing basement back-ups.

Materials that should **not** be flushed or dumped down the drain include:

- ◆ grease (don't pour cooking grease & fat down the kitchen sink),
- ◆ plastic,
- ◆ baby wipes,
- ◆ hair,
- ◆ facial tissues and paper towels,
- ◆ diapers,
- ◆ feminine products.

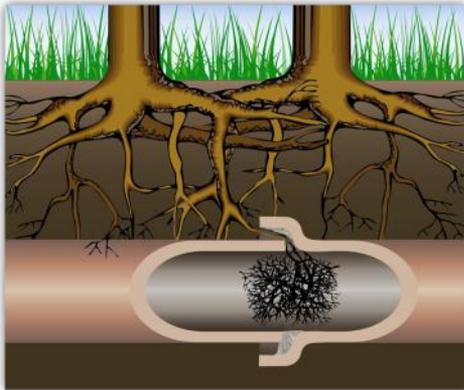
How can you help lateral sewer lines stay clean and clear?

- ◆ Have a licensed plumber inspect and clean your lateral sewer line.
- ◆ Don't pour grease or fat down your drains. Contain and put these in your trash.
- ◆ Keep trees and shrubs, and their roots, away from the lateral sewer line. Before you plant a tree or shrub, locate your lateral sewer line and make sure not to plant above it. It can cause the lateral sewer line to crack.
- ◆ Don't use your toilet as a trash can.



*Accumulated
grease and fat*

Root intrusion



Additional Property Owner Solutions

In addition to repairing and maintaining your private lateral sewer line, here are a few additional actions property owners can take to prevent sewer system issues:

Disconnect your downspouts, sump pumps and area drains. Your downspout, sump pump and/or area drain may be connected to the sanitary sewer system and contribute to sewer overflows and back-ups. Disconnecting them and redirecting them into a rain garden or rain barrel will reduce the load on our sanitary sewer systems preventing dangerous, costly, and smelly overflows.



Check sewer cleanout pipes.

The cleanout is usually a small pipe, about 4-inches in diameter, outside the house that is used to access the house lateral for cleaning. Make sure the cleanout is capped. By keeping the cleanout capped, you keep water out of the sewer system, as well as prevent sewer odors and gases from escaping.



Plant trees wisely.

Avoid planting trees and shrubs over or near the house lateral or the City sewer lines in your yard. Roots can damage sewers causing basement back-ups.

Install a backwater valve.

If basement back-ups are an issue on your property, you may want to install a backwater valve, a mechanism to prevent basement back-ups. Backwater valves provide a physical barrier to sewage back flowing into a home or business. A city permit is required to have a backwater valve installed and the valve should be installed by a licensed plumber.



Insure your sewer line.

Consider having insurance for unexpected sewer line repairs. Most homeowner insurance policies do not cover these costs. Several companies offer the insurance. Also, check your homeowner policy to see if damages in the home are covered in case of a sewer backup. If not, consider adding a sewer and drain endorsement to your policy.

It is important to know that you are responsible for repairing any damage to your property's lateral sewer line. You are also financially responsible for any damage to your property caused by a problem with your lateral sewer line, such as a blockage or a collapsed pipe. So, take steps to prevent problems with your sewer!

Recognize Warning Signs of Sewer Problems

As you do regular home maintenance and improvements you should keep your eyes – and nose – open to any of these warning signs that could indicate a problem with your lateral sewer line. By noticing these signs early, you may be able to avoid a basement back-up.

Some of the signs may include:

- changes in how your basement smells, like a damp or foul odor,
- toilets or sinks that fill or back-up when you flush or do laundry,
- water stains around the floor drain could mean the lateral sewer line is not draining properly,
- cracks in walls or floors can be the first sign of a broken lateral sewer line.

If you do detect one or more of these signs, it's best to have a licensed plumber look at your line.



What To Do During a Basement Back-up

If you have a back-up of sewage in your basement, follow these suggestions:

1. Determine where the lateral sewer line may be blocked and try to clear it. This will help you find out if the back-up is being caused by an internal plumbing problem or if internal plumbing problems are contributing to the situation.
2. If it is difficult to try to clear the lateral sewer line because of the excess amount of sewage, contact a local plumber to help determine the cause of the problem.
3. Stop using toilets and sinks unless absolutely necessary. Continued use can add to the back-up.
4. Keep children and pets out of basements flooded with sewage.
5. Locate sewer cleanout caps. They are located in the basement floor near a wall, close to the water meter or in older homes, the cap may be located at the base of the waste stack, which is the main internal drainage pipe coming down to the basement. Make sure the cleanout caps are not blocked by furniture or other items and that they are accessible to the plumber. ***Do not attempt to open the cleanout.***
6. Let your insurance company know you've had a back-up in your basement. Not all insurance companies cover back-ups.
7. Use waterproof boots and gloves to reduce potential contact with sewage. Always wash hands and any tools used.

Remember These Dos and Don'ts

Dos:

- ◆ Have a licensed plumber inspect and clean your private lateral sewer line every two to five years. Check more often if you experience a sewage-like odor or frequently clogged drains.
- ◆ Keep trees and shrubs, and their roots, away from the lateral sewer line.
- ◆ Be aware of sources of excess water entering your lateral sewer line.
- ◆ If you tend to have basement back-ups, ask a plumber if you need a backwater valve.
- ◆ Keep a record of maintenance and any issues with your lateral sewer line.
- ◆ Be responsible and keep your lateral sewer line clean so you and your neighbors won't have problems.

Don'ts:

- ◆ Don't pour grease or fat down your drains.
- ◆ Don't use your toilet as a trash can.
- ◆ Don't ignore warning signs of slow draining sewer lines.
- ◆ Don't flush pharmaceuticals, over-the-counter drugs or household chemicals (not intended for sewer maintenance) down the toilet or drains.

Record of Sewer Issue and Maintenance

It is important to have documentation of sewer-related issues for your record-keeping purposes.

Date	Issue Description

Plumber Contact Name

Plumber Contact Number

For more information:

Visit stjoemo.info

Call (816) 271-4693

