

STORM AND SANITARY SEWERS - PROBLEMS AND MAINTENANCE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Q** – Does the City of Richmond Heights clean out clogged or backed-up sewers?

A – The City of Richmond Heights contracts the cleaning and testing of sanitary and storm sewers to the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works. If you have a clogged or backed-up sewer *outside of your dwelling*, you can call the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works directly for emergency response at 216-443-8201. Clogs or backups *inside of the dwelling* must be cleared by a plumbing or sewer contractor at the homeowner's expense.

2. **Q** – My sewer has chronic drainage problems due to cracked or broken piping, tree roots, or other unknown causes. Who can help me identify the problem and recommend the necessary repairs?

A – For this type of problem a dye-test by the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works is recommended to first identify the nature and location of the problem. During the test a special camera is pushed through the sewer piping and a video is taken of the condition of the piping. This video can identify the nature and the exact location of the problem with the piping. The test is performed at no cost to the homeowner. Before any property can transfer title in Richmond Heights, the dye test must be performed to insure proper operation of the sanitary sewer. In both cases the work must be authorized by the City Building Department, and then scheduled by the homeowner with the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works. Call the Building Department for more information and to arrange the work.

3. **Q** – Once the sewer problem has been identified, will the City make the repairs?

A – The answer to this is a “maybe”. Every home has both a sanitary and a storm sewer cleanout somewhere in the front lawn or front property area of their home. If the problem that has been diagnosed is at the cleanout, or if it is in between the cleanout and the street, the problem will most likely be corrected by the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works. If the problem is either in or under the house, or if it is located under the lawn between the house and the cleanout, or if the problem turns out to be an improper connection of ground or rain water to the sanitary sewer, it will be the responsibility of the property owner to correct the problem with their own contractor. The City can suggest several names of contractors that work in this area for the homeowner's use in contacting them to estimate the cost of the repair. Contractors must be licensed and registered both by the City of Richmond Heights and by Cuyahoga County in order to work on the sewer system.

4. **Q** – What is an improper sewer connection? Is there more than one sewer?

A – Yes, most homes have both a *Sanitary Sewer* and a *Storm Sewer* connection. All of your bathroom, kitchen and laundry sewer piping, and all floor drains and air conditioning condensate piping, including garage floor drains, constitute sanitary sewage and must be connected only to the sanitary sewer system. Rain or ground water from roof downspouts, sump pumps, driveway drains, or the footer/foundation drain piping around your home must be connected only to the storm sewer system. If there is no storm sewer system in your neighborhood, those things must drain to a culvert or to other storm drainage basins. No type of rain or ground water may be directed into the sanitary sewer. Rain water often

causes sanitary sewers to overflow and back up into basements when improperly piped directly into the sanitary sewer. Improper connections that are discovered must be corrected at the homeowner's expense.

5. **Q** – I get backups of some type of water in my basement – possibly through the floor drains - after major rains. Can this problem be prevented?

A – Yes. The first thing to do is to try to identify the source of the water. To do that a dye-test of your sewers is recommended. This will insure that your floor drains, rain gutters, washing machines/laundry tubs, sump pumps and other sources of waste-water in your home are properly connected to the sewer system. The Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works performs these dye-tests on behalf of the City at no charge to the homeowner. Call the Building Department at 216-383-6312 for information regarding scheduling the test. The City and the County also work together to make available a grant of \$1,500 to homeowners to cover at least a portion of the cost of the installation of a device called a “backflow preventer” or a “backwater valve”. This device is placed in the sanitary sewer piping under the front lawn in a location that permits periodic maintenance of the device. The device allows sanitary waste water from your home to flow only in one direction through the piping - toward the street. It will not permit the waste water to flow backwards from the street into your basement during storm events. This is a reimbursement grant and **must be pre-approved before any work is performed**. You should also be aware that the presence of a backflow preventer may complicate or even prevent the Cuyahoga County Department of Public Works from being able to clean or service the piping in the future. For more information, consult the Building Department.

6. **Q** – Do my rain gutters have to be connected to the storm sewer system or can they terminate on a splash block next to my home?

A – It is always best for both your property and the structure of your home to dispose of the storm water in a way that gets it completely away from your house and property and into the storm sewer system efficiently. Water that is deposited on splash blocks immediately adjacent to the structure's foundation often finds its way down the basement wall and can result in a wet or damp basement. Water from splash blocks also cannot be permitted to adversely affect the neighbor's property, driveway or foundation. It is strongly recommended that it be piped to the storm sewer.

7. **Q** – Water enters my basement through the wall or where the wall meets the floor. What can cause this?

A – This is a foundation drain and/or waterproofing problem. It is often caused by poor or inefficient drainage and/or disposal of rain water from your gutters and downspouts. See the explanation in item #6 above. The City will look at the problem if requested to see what if anything can be done to relieve the problem. You can call the Building Department (216-383-6312) if you have these types of problems.

8. **Q** – Does Richmond Heights have allowances for rain barrels or rain gardens?

A – Yes, Richmond Heights has a program patterned closely after the program offered by The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. The Building Department has a useful Packet of Information dealing with rain barrels or rain gardens and the associated cost savings from Sewer District storm water charges for your use and convenience.