

BASEMENT BACK UPS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SANITARY VERSUS FLOODING – UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

What is a sanitary sewer backup and how do I identify it?

- Many homes in Fond du Lac have floor drains located in the basement. These drains are connected to your sanitary sewer lateral and can be the source of the backup. Residents may experience gray water with a sewage like odor coming from the drain typically located in the basement or experience slow draining sinks or toilets in the house.

What can cause a sanitary sewer backup in my basement?

- A number of factors can cause sanitary sewer backups. They typically involve a blockage in either the sanitary sewer main (located in the street) or the private sanitary lateral (the pipe that connects the house to the sanitary sewer main.) Causes may include a break in the pipe, cracks due to tree roots, deficiencies in the sanitary system, lack of capacity due to excessive Clearwater, or construction issues. In homes and businesses often times the main cause of a backup is the accumulation of grease, tree roots, hair, or solid materials, such as disposable diapers or sanitary napkins that are too large for wastewater pipes to handle.

What is Clearwater?

- Groundwater, Stormwater, and Rainwater are often referred to as Clearwater. Clearwater does not belong in the sanitary collection system, it belongs in the storm collection system. The storm and the sanitary are separate systems and are designed to handle different volumes of water. The sanitary is not designed to handle Clearwater. Clearwater enters the sanitary system through Infiltration, water leaking in through basement walls and defective sanitary laterals, mainlines, and manholes. It also enters the sanitary system through direct connections, often referred to as Inflow. Examples of Inflow would be illegal sump pump, foundation, and roof drain connections to the sanitary system.

Can my sump pump discharge into the sanitary sewer?

- No, if it does please route it outside. The excess clear water pumped by the sump pump does not belong in the sanitary. In fact, you would be contributing to the basement backups many residents deal with during wet weather events due to excessive clear water in the sanitary system.

What should I do if sewage backs up in my home?

- Do not run any water down your drains until the blockage is cleared.
- If possible, check with your neighbors to see if the backup is widespread in your neighborhood or localized to your property only.
- If the issue is widespread, contact the City of Fond du Lac Municipal Service Center at 920-322-3540 during business hours of 7:00 am to 3:30 pm or after hours the Dispatch Center at 920-906-5555. City crews will respond to the area and inspect the sanitary sewer mains in the street to

see if they are flowing or if there is blockage. After investigating the area, they will work to restore the system.

- If the issue is local to your property, you will need to contact a plumber to investigate the sewer pipe on your property. Maintenance and repair of the private sewer is the owner's responsibility.

Is there anything I can do to prevent sanitary sewer backup in my home?

- Don't pour grease down the drain. Cooking oil can harden within your pipes; it gradually stops debris from draining, creating a clog. To properly dispose of grease or fat, pour it into a heat-resistant container and throw it in the trash after it cools off.
- Only flush the 3 P's – Pee, Poop, and Paper. Flushing hygiene products such as personal or baby wipes, diapers, or feminine hygiene products down the toilet can easily clog your sewer line.
- Install an approved backwater prevention valve. This fixture allows sewage to leave but prevents it from backing up into your home. For further information about this and other preventive measures, contact a plumber or plumbing supply dealer.
- If the building sewer in your older home has a jointed pipe system, consider whether the roots of large shrubs or trees near the line could invade and break pipes.
- Make sure you do not have any illegal connections to your sanitary lateral. This includes sump pumps, connected foundation drains, downspouts and yard drains.

What is the City doing to help prevent sanitary backups in homes?

- Every attempt is made to prevent backups in the public wastewater system before they occur.
- In addition, the City has maintenance crews assigned to inspecting and cleaning sanitary mains throughout the City's collection area on a regular schedule. These crews are checking for leaks, holes, and other damages that may have occurred. They are also cleaning and removing debris build up to prevent blockages that could contribute to basement backups. Any necessary repairs are scheduled on a priority basis.
- The City reconstructs about one mile of streets a year, replacing all aging infrastructure within the right-of-way.
- The City has flow monitoring in various locations in the City to help focus efforts in the needed areas.

BASEMENT AND SURFACE WATER FLOODING

What is a flood?

- Flooding is an overflow of large amounts of water onto a normally dry land. Flooding happens in many ways due to overflow of streams, rivers, lakes. Ice jams, or because of an excessive rain or runoff event.

What may be the source of my basement flooding?

- During periods of rain, basements may be infiltrated by surface or clear water. Clearwater may seep through cracks in walls, windows, floors, or failure of your sump pump if your home is equipped with one. Although the City does not remediate basement flooding, there are steps property owners can take to help protect and prevent basement flooding.

How can I prevent basement flooding?

- Repair foundation cracks - Check your home's concrete foundation for any cracks or signs of stress. That includes the exterior if visible and your basement's floor and walls. You can use epoxy to repair small cracks, but you will need professional help if serious.
- Clean downspouts and gutters - Rainwater can pool and seep into your home if your gutters or downspouts are clogged with debris. Regularly clean your gutters and make sure your downspouts end at least three feet away from your home so water will freely flow away.
- Cover window wells - Water can collect in window wells and seep through to your basement floor. Securing your window wells with clear acrylic covers will help to keep out water.
- Maintain your sump pump - Your sump pump is responsible for preventing water damage to your home, but it can fail due to a clog or power outage. Be sure to inspect your sump pump to make sure it is running correctly.
- Regrade your foundation - A little landscaping can go a long way in making sure rainwater drains away from your home and basement.

Why do streets flood in heavy rainfall events?

- During periods of heavy rainfall, the roadway drainage and storm sewer systems may not have sufficient capacity to drain the water as quickly as during normal rainfall. The general topography of Fond du Lac is extremely flat, with clay soils. Because of the generally flat topography of the area, the majority of the storm sewer system is directed to strategically placed high capacity pumping stations. The storm water collects in the well and when full discharges to one of the waterways. During the pumping stage, the system fills which, at times, backs up the storm catch basins and street.

What is a storm water pump station?

- Storm water pump stations collect and transfer storm water from the collection system into local waterways. The City currently has 23 active storm water pump stations. The storm water pump stations are monitored at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. In the event one of the pump stations fails an alarm will activate at the Wastewater Plant at which time WCTS will notify a foreman at C & M.

What is the City doing to help prevent surface flooding?

- The City has several programs to help reduce surface flooding. The City has two street sweepers, which removes debris that collects in the gutters and may clog catch basins. Additionally crews complete river tree maintenance to ensure the waterways are not obstructed. During the thaw, crews drill holes in the ice on the waterways to help break up the ice and prevent ice jams. Storm sewers, ditches, and the storm water pump stations are also cleaned on a schedule to remove debris and sediment. Each year the City reconstructs approximately one mile of roadway to improve aging infrastructure.