

Sewer Laterals: Street or Alley Main Connection

Maintenance: Keep your Lateral Clean

Roots, cooking grease and debris are destructive elements to any wastewater system.

Roots, cooking grease and debris problems in a sewer lateral are the responsibility of the property owner.

Keep your lateral free of anything that may inhibit the flow and lead to a possible sewage spill. To avoid problems with:

Roots—Use a root inhibitor available at most hardware stores or schedule it for periodic mechanical cleaning.

Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG)—In addition to frying pan grease, fats and oils can also come from salad dressings, butter and mayonnaise. Put FOG in the trash and not down the drain.

(Go to <http://www.sandiego.gov/mwwd/pdf/greaseeng.pdf> to view/download a FOG brochure.)

Debris—Be careful what you put down the drains. Items like disposable wipes, toys, disposal diapers, toilet paper, and feminine hygiene products can cause blockages.

What Is A Sewer Lateral?

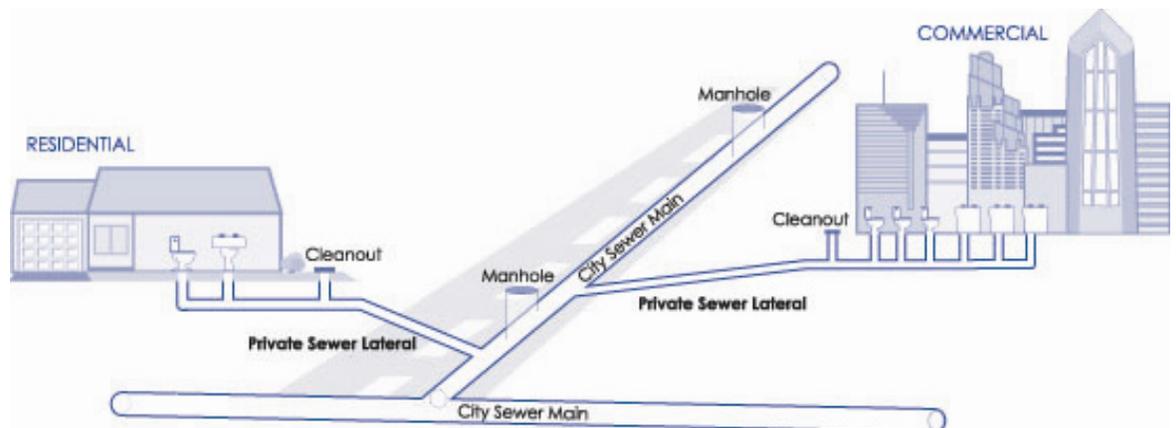
A sewer lateral is the pipe that connects all the sinks, drains and toilets in your home or building to the City sewer main, which is usually located in the City's right-of-way (street). The entire length of the sewer lateral, extending from your home or building to its point of connection with the City sewer main underneath the street, is your private property.

Maintenance Is The Property Owner's Responsibility

It is your responsibility as a property owner to maintain your sewer lateral. Proper maintenance includes keeping your lateral clean and clear of any obstruction, such as roots, grease and debris. The level, type and frequency of maintenance required is highly dependent on the age and type of lateral (e.g., plastic vs. cast iron) and the practices of the building occupants. Newer, plastic laterals with intact joints and seals may function for years without problems. Older laterals of concrete, clay or cast iron may have root intrusion or deteriorated sections and require regular inspection and/or more frequent cleaning.

Minimizing Lateral Problems

Drainage problems are commonly caused by obstruction or blockage in the lateral. You can minimize or eliminate such problems by being careful of what you dispose of in your drains and garbage disposals and what you flush down the toilet. Fats, oils and grease (FOG) can clog laterals and eventually block the sewer mains. (For information on how to properly dispose of FOG and other waste see blue box at left).



If a Problem Occurs

If your drains start to run slowly, there's a good chance you have some sort of obstruction in your lateral. A licensed plumber or drain-cleaning specialist should be able to clear the obstruction. If the lateral is broken, you will have to repair the lateral. In general, problems with your lateral are your responsibility as the property owner.



NOTE: Encroachment sewer laterals and sewer laterals located within easements are subject to different rules and policies. For more information, please click here (or visit the link online), at <http://www.sandiego.gov/mwwd/general/plumbing.shtml>

If you have lost all sewer facilities (e.g. toilet cannot flush and water will not drain at all) as a result of a total blockage or pipe break located in the section of lateral within the City's right-of-way (street), the City may correct the problem at no expense to you. Your plumber must first file a plumber's report (free of charge) over the phone by calling the City's Water and Sewer Emergency Line at (619) 515-3525. City crews will respond within 24 hours of the report and perform work subject to the following conditions:

- If the City's investigation finds that the problem is located in the section of the lateral inside your property line, City crews will not perform work.
- If a private structure or object, such as a block wall, blocks City crews' access to the section of lateral within the City's right-of-way, they will not perform work.
- If City crews find the problem was caused by the lack of routine maintenance of the sewer lateral (e.g. clearing roots or grease), the property owner will be billed for the cost of the City's response (time, equipment, labor, materials and overhead).
- The City will under no circumstances dig on private property.

If There is a Sewage Spillage

If sewage has spilled from your cleanout, you should control and contain the spill as much as possible with sandbags, dirt or cat litter, turn off the water if necessary, and call a licensed plumber or drain-cleaning specialist.

If the spillage has extended into the City's right-of-way (street), then call the City's Water and Sewer Emergency Line at (619) 515-3525. City crews will clean up spillage within the City's right-of-way. You will be held responsible for the City's response costs if the spillage resulted from a blockage or break in the section of the sewer lateral located under your property.

If you need more information on the City's sewer lateral policies, visit our Wastewater website or click here at <http://www.sandiego.gov/mwwd/general/plumbing.shtml>.

Submitting a Video

If your sewer facilities are not fully blocked but there is a structural problem and you wish to submit a video from the plumber, you may submit the video to the City. The City will review it and consider taking action if the structural defect warrants that action. Call Public Utilities' Construction Support section at 858-614-5742 for more information.

City Council Policy 400-10 Maintenance of Street/Alley Sewer Laterals

“The property owner shall be responsible for both the routine maintenance and the required cleaning of the sewer line, from the building to the City sewer main.

When failure or stoppage of a sewer lateral occurs, City crews will not respond until the property owner has established, through the use of a licensed plumber or certified drain cleaning service, that the stoppage or failure is between the property line and the sewer main, and that it is beyond the scope of the property owner to relieve or repair. The licensed plumber or licensed drain cleaning service is to contact the City of San Diego Water and Sewer 24-Hour Emergency Service.

The City of San Diego shall respond to calls and make repairs when the licensed plumber or licensed drain cleaner has established that the sewer lateral is blocked or has collapsed beyond the property line in a public right-of-way.

If City crews respond to a call to make repairs, and it is determined that the property owner could have effectively maintained or repaired the lateral and failed to do so, the property owner will be billed for the full cost of City services including labor, material, equipment and overhead.”

Common Questions and Answers About Your Sewer Lateral

Q: There is a bad odor coming from my drains. Who do I call?

A: For sewer odors originating from inside your home or building, call a licensed plumber or drain-cleaning specialist. (Please consult your local yellow pages, as the City of San Diego cannot provide any recommendations). For sewer odors originating from outside your home or building, call the City's Water and Sewer Emergency Line at (619) 515-3525.

Q: Sewage has backed up into my home or building. What should I do?

A: For assistance with sewer backups, call a licensed plumber or drain-cleaning specialist. (Please consult your local yellow pages, as the City of San Diego cannot provide any recommendations). Obstructions in your lateral should be cleared by a licensed plumber or drain-cleaning specialist. If the blockage cannot be cleared by routine maintenance methods or the lateral is broken, then lateral will need to be repaired. Repairing your lateral is generally your responsibility. If the problem in the lateral is located past your property line, within the City's right-of-way, and you have no sewer facilities (e.g. toilet cannot flush and water will not drain at all), then have your plumber file a report with the City's Water and Sewer Emergency Line at (619) 515-3525.

Q: Does the City require a property line cleanout?

A: No, the City of San Diego does not require property line cleanouts.

Q: I have to call a plumber several times each year to clear my lateral. Isn't there a limit to how many times I have to call a plumber before it is the City's responsibility to do something?

A: No, there is no limit to how many times you have to call a plumber to clean your lateral if the problem is related to maintenance (e.g. roots or grease/debris buildup). Remember, you are the owner of your private lateral.

Q: Does the City charge for plumbers' reports?

A: No, the City of San Diego does not charge to file a plumber's report.

Q: Will the City reimburse me for the expenses I incurred?

A: No, there is no reimbursement for plumbing expenses. You are responsible for the maintenance of your sewer lateral. The City of San Diego will only repair or clear at no charge to you a problem located in the section of the lateral that lies beyond your property line and in the City right-of-way (street), provided that you have lost all sewer facilities (e.g. toilet cannot flush and water will not drain at all) and that the problem was not caused by your lack of routine maintenance.