

## **Village of St. Louis Sewer Back-up Policy**

The Village of St. Louis is responsible for maintaining sewer mains and manholes, which are located in public rights-of-way (Village and Provincial maintained roads) and Village owned easements. Property owners are responsible for keeping sewer laterals free of blockages. A sewer lateral or house lateral is the pipeline between the Village sanitary sewer main and the building, which it serves.

The Village of St. Louis Water & Sewer Maintenance Department makes a concerted effort, through an intensive preventive maintenance program, to keep the many metres of sewer system in a good state of repair and operation. Occasionally, however, conditions develop within the system that may cause sewage to back-up into a residence or business.

By authority given to the municipality through *The Municipalities Act*, the Village of St. Louis is not liable in an action based on nuisance, or on any other tort that does not require a finding of intention or negligence, for any loss or damage arising, directly or indirectly, from any public works, including streets, or from the operation or non-operation of a public utility, therefore will not assume any liability for any sewer back up damage, loss or clean-up resulting from failure of the sewer infrastructure regardless of cause unless negligence on the part of the Village can be determined.

The purpose of this Policy is to make clear the property owner's responsibilities concerning the sewage lines located on their property and the steps a property owner should take when a sewage back-up occurs into a residence or business. This policy also addresses some of the reasons why sewer back-ups occur and what can be done to prevent them.

### **I. PROPERTY OWNER'S RESPONSIBILITY**

A property owner is responsible for keeping the building sewer line free from blockages between the structure(s) being served and the sewer main.

More often than not, the cause of a back up in your lateral is from items that the line is not meant to handle, such as kid's toys, underwear, diapers, paper products (other than toilet paper), keys and even false teeth. Another possible cause would be roots in your lateral. The lateral is the responsibility of the owner of the property from the house to the sewer main.

If a customer discovers a problem with his or her sewer connection and/or lateral, the customer may contact the Water & Sewer Maintenance Foreman or the Village Office and request that Water & Sewer Maintenance personnel troubleshoot the cause of the problem. Water & Sewer Maintenance will respond by inspecting the downstream wastewater collection main.

If sewage backs-up into the property owner's property, the property owner should contact the Village's Water & Sewer Maintenance Foreman or Village Office immediately. The Water & Sewer Maintenance Department will respond as quickly as possible to assess the situation and ensure that the Village's sewer system serving the property is flowing freely.

Village Maintenance personnel are not authorized to provide any information concerning the investigation or the cause of the sewer back-up. The Village Administrator will be advised and will inform the property owner of the findings. If the problem stems within the Village mains they will be

cleared at the Village expense. If the problems are within the lateral, the property owner will be notified to contact a plumber or sewer line service contractor to clear their portion of the lateral at their cost.

If wastewater back-up has damaged a property owner's property, the resident should take reasonable and prudent action to prevent further damage. A resident should take whatever action is believed necessary to correct the problem, including contacting a clean-up or restoration contractor and their insurance provider to determine the level of coverage, if any. The Village insurance will only pay for loss or damage resulting from a blocked sewer main only if negligence on the part of the Village can be determined.

## **II. WHY DO SEWER LINES BACK UP?**

Many things may become lodged in a sewer line which can result in a back up; e.g. sticks, rocks, bricks, pieces of broken pipe, rags, GREASE, paper towels, newspaper, sanitary napkins, plastics, etc. While it is illegal for persons to place or discharge such things into the sewer system, these items still unfortunately appear. Two of the leading causes of blockages and back-ups are GREASE and tree roots. Tree roots grow naturally and intrude into the Village's sewer lines. While there is not a lot the Village can do to prevent tree root expansion, the Water & Sewer Maintenance Department does employ preventative measures to inhibit tree root growth and remove tree roots from its sewer lines.

Fats, Oils, & Grease (FOG) are a major contributor to sewer back-ups and overflows. Under authority of the Plumbing & Drainage regulations and enforced by the Local Health Authority, commercial garages with work bays (and similar businesses), that will be cleaned into the sewer system are required to have a grit interceptor; restaurants are required to have a grease interceptor. Owners/operators are to maintain in working order and not cause an issue to the municipal sewer. Residential users should never discard fats, oils or grease into a drain. The Village has a re-cycle container for used cooking oils and grease located adjacent to the Community Arena that these items can be safely discarded into. If re-cycling is not an option, FOG can be discarded with regular trash provided that it is properly cooled and secured in a non leak container.

## **III. CAN ANYTHING BE DONE TO PREVENT FUTURE BACK-UPS?**

If a property owner has experienced a sewer back-up or if the residence or business is located in a low area or is lower than the street level, we suggest that a licensed plumber be consulted about the possibility of installing a backwater prevention device. This device, if properly installed and MAINTAINED, can prevent sewer from backing up into a house's or business' plumbing. The installation and maintenance of a backwater prevention device is the customer's responsibility and at the customer's expense.

## **IV. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

- *Sewage is backing up into my house/building through overflowing toilets, sinks, bathtubs and/or floor drain. What should I do?*

If these problems occur, call the Village to request service and to determine whether the location of the blockage is on the Village's or on the customer's line. There may be a problem in the public main. The Village of St. Louis is only responsible for publicly owned and maintained sewers. If the cause is determined to be on the resident's lateral you will be requested to contact a plumber or sewer service contractor, your insurance company and a cleanup and restoration firm.

- *I have slow drainage through my toilets, showers and sinks. What can I do about it?*

If neighbors are having similar slow drainage, there is a chance that there is a problem in the public main. For service call the Village Office or Maintenance Foreman immediately.

- *A contractor or utility broke my sewer lateral. What should I do?*

The contractor or utility owner is responsible for repairing laterals that the contractor damages.

- *What can I do about terrible sewer odors?*

First, try to determine where the odor is coming from (inside the home or outside in the street). If an odor is coming from inside the home, there may be a problem with the internal plumbing system. Check your internal system first. If the problem exists outdoors, call the Village of St. Louis Office or Maintenance Foreman.

- *I paid a plumber to repair my sewer lateral. It turns out the problem was occurring in the public sewer. Can I be reimbursed for my plumbing bill?*

The Village will not pay for private plumber bills unless the Village directs that a plumber be called to solve a problem that is the Village's responsibility. Occasionally, homeowners call a plumber or sewer and drain service to correct a problem with their private sewer laterals, and it turns out that the cause of the problem was a stoppage in the publicly owned sewer. In these instances, the Village may reimburse the homeowner for a portion or all of the cost of the plumber or drain service. To have your case reviewed, follow these simple steps:

1. Write a letter outlining the circumstances and enclose a copy of the paid invoice from the plumber or drain service.
2. Submit the paperwork to the Village of St. Louis municipal office.

## **HELPFUL HINTS**

Here are a few hints to help you prevent problems with your sewer service.

- Do not use the toilet as a garbage can. Do NOT flush rags, sanitary napkins, plastic items, cigarette butts, etc., which may clog your sewer line. Sewer taps are generally a minimum of 4

inches unless the customer uses a pump. Almost all of the Village's sewer mains are a minimum of 8 inches in diameter.

- DON'T DISPOSE OF GREASE IN THE DRAIN.
- Use the garbage disposal with enough water to flush debris all the way to the sewer main. Otherwise, grease and detergent may harden and clog your line.
- Don't plant trees near your sewer lateral
- Don't connect French drains, downspouts, sump pumps etc. directly into the sewer line.
- Do install a Backwater Prevention Device.
- The Village of St. Louis Water & Sewer Maintenance crews are experienced employees who may be able to suggest a solution to your problem. However, they are NOT authorized to enter and clear stoppages on private property.
- Property owners should be aware that many property insurance policies exclude damage from sewer back-ups. It is suggested that property owners check their policies and add this coverage. The Village's insurance will only pay for damage caused by negligence on the part of the Village.
- The Village will not pay for private plumber bills unless the Village directs that a plumber be called to solve a problem that is the Village's responsibility. Property owners are advised to call the Village Office or Maintenance Foreman immediately in the event of sewer back-ups, which could possibly be caused by a problem in Village maintained lines. The Village will assist property owners in locating the problem, advise the property owner on action needed, and correct the problem if it is a Village responsibility.

The following excerpt from Village of St. Louis Municipal Bylaw Number Five, 2008 outlines all contraventions regarding disposals into the municipal sewer system:

- (c) No person shall place, deposit, discharge or suffer or permit or cause to be placed, deposited or discharged into a fixture, building drain, sanitary sewer connection or the sewage works system any of the following:
  - (i) liquid or vapour having a temperature greater than 65 Centigrade;
  - (ii) gasoline, benzene, fuel, oil, paint, solvent or any other flammable or explosive liquid, solid or gas;
  - (iii) garbage;
  - (iv) ashes, cinders, grit, sand, stone, cloth, clothing, plastic bags or plastic sheeting or any other solid substance;
  - (v) any noxious or malodorous substances capable of creating a public nuisance in or damage to the sewage works system or hazard to the health of personnel carrying out the duties in relation to the sewage works system;
  - (vi) wastes having a pH lower than 5.5 or higher than 9.5
  - (vii) radioactive waste;
  - (viii) wastes containing any of the exotic communicable diseases listed by Health Canada as requiring special handling; or

- (ix) wastes containing microbiology laboratory waste consisting of:  
laboratory cultures, stocks or specimens of microorganisms, live or attenuated vaccines, human or animal cell cultures used in research and laboratory material that has come into contact with any of the same.
- (d) Every person who has knowledge that a substance has been discharged contrary to Subsection 4(c) shall forthwith report to the Village Administrator unless he has reasonable grounds to believe that it has been reported to the Village Administrator by another person.