

What Is a Sanitary Sewer Overflow?

The formal name for a sewer backup is a sanitary sewer overflow, or SSO. An SSO is an unintentional discharge, spill, or release of untreated sewage into the environment or a property. The resulting flooding can cause damage to a property.

Sewer backups can be caused by:

- ➔ A blocked or collapsed private sewer lateral
- ➔ Improper disposal of grease that blocks sewer lines or internal plumbing
- ➔ Obstructions or breaks in the sewer lines or in internal plumbing
- ➔ Unusually heavy rainfall, which can cause inflow of storm water into sewer lines

Raw sewage is dangerous, because it contains bacteria and other hazardous microorganisms. Touching or walking through contaminated areas can bring germs into uncontaminated areas of your home. Children and pets are especially vulnerable.



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Henry F. Vitale
*Executive Director/CFO
and Treasurer*

Sewer Backup Cleanup Procedures

Health & Safety Tips

During the cleanup, take proper precautions:

- ➔ *Avoid direct contact with sewage, and be particularly careful of your face and eyes.*
- ➔ *Always wear protective rubber gloves, eyewear, and boots, and be especially careful if you have cuts or open sores. Rain gear is also advisable.*
- ➔ *Assume everything touched by sewage is contaminated.*
- ➔ *Clean and disinfect everything sewage has touched.*
- ➔ *Wash, disinfect, or discard any clothing or supplies used in the cleanup immediately after use.*



If you encounter a sanitary sewer overflow, contact the Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year at 617-989-7000.

Cleanup Steps

After the cause of the backup is resolved, the most important cleanup steps are to restore the environment to a dry state and salvage any valuable property. The longer that sewage is allowed to remain in your home, the greater the potential for damage to your home and its contents, and for health problems to develop for your family.

Steps to reduce the health risks from a building contaminated with an SSO:

- 1** *Remove any excess water from the property by using pumps or wet vacs, or by mopping.*
- 2** *Pump excess sewage back into the unobstructed sewer lateral or into a vacuum truck for removal. **Do not pump sewage outside or into the catch basins in the street.***
- 3** *Use dehumidifiers and active ventilation when available.*
- 4** *Collect and dispose of all contaminated materials.*
- 5** *Discard all upholstered furniture and mattresses. Remove and clean or discard other contaminated furniture.*
- 6** *Wash and disinfect affected areas with a solution of one-quarter cup household bleach to one gallon of water.*

How to Find a Cleaning Service

Building owners may decide to use a professional cleaning service. Search either online or in the phone book for “Water Damage,” “Fire Restoration,” or “Mold Abatement” to find cleaning companies. It is recommended that building owners check the company’s references and determine that the company is insured.

Reminders

Keep Records of Damage and Cleanup:

It is recommended that building owners take pictures of property damage for their records and include the date, time, and specific areas of the building where the backup occurred (i.e., floor drain, toilet, or shower drain). If building owners hire a professional service, retain all receipts from the work done.

Inform Your Insurance Company:

BWSC recommends that building owners inform their insurance carrier that a backup took place. If you believe you experienced a backup due to a defect in the Commission’s system, you may file a claim with BWSC. Contact the BWSC Claims Department at 617-989-7000.

For More Information

For additional instructions, go to <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/wastewater/flooding-and-sewage-back-ups-home-care-guide.html>.