

# Know and Maintain Your Sewer System

Leaking or broken sewer laterals are a problem in many urbanized areas of Santa Cruz County. Sewer laterals connect your home drains to the public sewer system. Broken or leaking laterals contribute to groundwater pollution, high bacteria counts at creeks and beaches, and often allow storm water to infiltrate to the sanitary sewer system. This can cause major sewage spills, public health issues and beach closures. It's important to do your part to keep residential sewer laterals in proper working order. These tips will help you prevent sewer overflows.

## Pollution Prevention Tips



Small changes can make a

**BIG**  
difference.

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# Preventing Plumbing Problems and Sewer Overflows



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- It is the property owner's responsibility to maintain residential sewer laterals, not just to the curbside, but all the way to the connection with the main line.
- Typically, most homeowners must clear a blockage out of their sewer lateral every 2 to 3 years. Plan to have a professional plumber clear your lateral using mechanical means at least every 2 years to avoid having unpleasant sewer backups in your home or yard.
- Learn the location and flow direction of all sewer lines and clean-outs on your property.
- Avoid the use of chemical products to clear your line. These can damage your sewer line and are not usually effective.
- Replace faulty laterals before they fail. Sewer lateral failure can result in raw sewage entering waterways and a costly cleanup bill.

## Prevent Blockages

- Kitchen grease is a leading cause of blockages in residential sewer lines. Never pour grease down the drain. Use a coffee can with a lid to collect cooking grease, freeze it, and dispose of it in the trash.
- Solids flushed down the sewer can also cause overflows. Know what can and can't be flushed down the sewer. Products are often advertised as flushable, even though they are not. Hair, dental floss, birth control of any kind, food waste, medications, gloves, rags and clothing, wipes, and diapers are all things that have damaged sewer laterals and lines. See the Drain Etiquette Brochure from the Santa Cruz County Sanitation District at <http://www.dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/environment.htm>
- Tree roots are another common source of clogs. Do not plant tall hedges or trees in the vicinity of sewer lines. Roots can also cause serious structural damage to sewer pipes. For more information about controlling roots in your sewer lines, visit [www.centalsan.org](http://www.centalsan.org)
- Once roots infiltrate a house lateral sewer line, it's only a matter of time before they cause a blockage. One of the best ways to prevent this is to schedule regular cleaning of your sewer lateral by a professional plumbing service. Augers, root saws, and high-pressure flushers are the most common methods of removing roots from sewer pipes.
- Root-killing compounds containing copper cause serious water pollution problems and are not recommended.

<http://www.dpw.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/environment.htm>

## What To Do in Case of a Blockage or Sewage Overflow

- If sewage is actively flowing onto the street or into a storm drain call **911**.
- A professional plumbing service can inspect and clear your lateral sewer lines.
- If your lateral sewer line is completely clogged with grease and must be flushed into a public line, notify the local sewer agency so that they can remove the grease from their lines as well.

## Inspect and Replace Laterals at Time of Resale

Several cities around the Monterey Bay have adopted ordinances that require homeowners to inspect lateral sewer lines when the home is being sold and replace the lateral if it is defective. If you are buying a home, it is always a good idea to have the sewer inspected prior to close of escrow. This ensures that the repair or replacement costs can be negotiated prior to purchase of the home.

**Pollution prevention  
can be easy. Small  
changes in the way you  
do things around the  
house and in your yard  
make a big difference.**

### For more information call:

City of Santa Cruz  
Environmental Compliance  
**831-420-6050**

City of Watsonville  
Utilities Customer Service  
**831-768-3133**

County of Santa Cruz  
Sanitation Operations  
**831-477-3907**

