

Sewage Water in my Home!!!!

First Steps

If you have a back-up of water and/or sewage in your basement:

1. Check the toilets, sinks and waste pipes and clear any blockages to ensure that the water is not due to an internal plumbing problem. (Roof vent blockages can cause gurgling).
2. If that does not solve the problem, call the City at 902-432-1201 and staff will come out to determine the cause of the problem. Be patient; City staff will respond as soon as possible. Make sure someone is home to let the staff person in if necessary.
3. Don't use toilets and sinks unless it is absolutely necessary. (Any water sent down the drain will likely end up in your basement.) If you have a wash going you can turn off your main water valve for the house.
4. Locate the building sewer clean-out caps for your home. They are usually in the basement floor near the front wall, close to the water meter. Make sure that the clean-out caps are not blocked by furniture or other things and that they are accessible to City staff.
Do not attempt to open the clean-out.

Assess Risks

Bacteria or viruses

- Immediately add small amounts of chlorine bleach to standing water.
- Remove standing water with pumps or pails, then with a wet/dry shop vacuum.

Water contaminated with sewage may contain a number of bacteria and viruses, which can affect health. The major health concern is related to organisms that affect the gastrointestinal tract causing vomiting and diarrhea (gastroenteritis), and those that affect the liver (Hepatitis A, yellow jaundice). You can contract these illnesses by consuming contaminated food or water, or by putting contaminated hands or articles into your mouth. These bacteria and viruses are not transmitted through the air. Skin irritation or infection can also occur from contact with contaminated water, particularly if open cuts or sores are present.

Electricity

It is **NOT** safe to enter your basement if the water level has reached any plug, electrical outlet, extension cord or baseboard heater.

If the water has not yet reached any plug, electrical outlet or baseboard heater and your distribution panel and main switch are still above water, you may be able to shut off the power

yourself. Wear rubber boots when walking on a wet surface. If you plan to shut off the electricity at the main switch, first make sure the surface you are standing on is dry and that you are not touching metal (pipes, ladder, etc.). Since dry wood is not a good electrical conductor, stand on a wooden stool or chair, and then shut off the main switch using a dry wooden stick such as a broom handle.

If this is not possible, or if the water has reached the panel or main switch, do not touch anything. Call an electrical contractor licensed to work in PEI. Summerside Electric 902-**432-1201** can shut off the power at an outside meter, hydro pole or transformer.

Before turning the power back on after the water subsides, call an electrical contractor to check your installation and confirm that there is no risk of electrocution or fire if the power is restored.

If the main switch was flooded or if the service was cut off at the meter or the pole, Summerside Electric will reconnect the power after it has been inspected and approved.

Documentation

- Take photos and videos of damage.
- Contact your insurance agent.

Clean-up

- Never mix ammonia and bleach.

What to keep or discard

Subject to confirmation with your insurance company's evaluation, the following may have to be discarded if they have been in contact with wastewater:

- All insulation materials, and all less expensive articles that have been soaked, including particleboard furniture, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys and pillows
- Furniture coverings, padding and cushions. The frames of good quality wood furniture can sometimes be salvaged, but must be cleaned, disinfected, rinsed and dried by ventilation away from direct sunlight or heat.
- Scrape heavy dirt from washable clothes, rinse and wash several times in cold water treated with chlorine bleach, and dry quickly
- Separate valuable papers. You may wish to ask a lawyer whether to save the papers themselves or just the information on them.

Recommended procedures for cleaning

- Wear protective clothing: overalls, gloves, protective eyeglasses, rubber boots and a facemask
- Stay clear of electrical equipment and do not attempt to change any fuses if you are standing in water or on damp ground
- If you can, shut off the electrical power
- Open windows to allow fresh air in
- Ventilate and ensure that there is adequate airflow to remove any fumes. Dehumidify the house until it is completely dry.
- Immediately add small amounts of chlorine bleach to standing water
- Remove standing water with pumps or pails, then with a wet/dry shop vacuum
- Wash and wipe down all surfaces and structures with chlorine bleach, ensuring that there is adequate cross ventilation to remove fumes. Then rinse again.
- Disinfect the walls and the floor using a chlorine bleach and water solution. Wait for the area to dry completely before re-using it.
- Wipe down surfaces that have not been directly affected with a solution of one part chlorine bleach to four parts cold or tepid (not hot) water, mixed with a small amount of non-ammonia dishwashing detergent (chlorine bleach and ammonia, when mixed together, produce toxic fumes). Then rinse.
- Hose down any dirt sticking to walls and furnishings then rinse several times, removing the remaining water with a wet/dry shop vacuum.
- Work from the top down. Break out all ceilings and walls that have been soaked or that have absorbed water. Remove wall materials at least 50 cm above the high-water lines.
- Rinse then clean all floors as quickly as possible. Replace flooring that has been deeply penetrated by floodwater or sewage.
- Carpets must be dried within two days. Sewage-soaked carpets must be discarded. Homeowners can't effectively dry large areas of soaked carpets themselves – qualified professionals are required.
- Clean and deodorize carpets or have them professionally cleaned.
- Clean all interior cavities with a solution of water, chlorine bleach and non-ammonia dish detergent and dry thoroughly, checking often for mould and killing it with chlorine bleach. Ensure that structural members are dry (which could take weeks) before closing cavities in walls, crawl spaces, etc.
- Remove all soaked and dirty materials and debris including wet insulation and drywall, residual mud and soil, furniture, appliances, clothing and bedding.
- Scrub affected furniture with antibacterial soap and water and place outside to dry (weather permitting) or steam clean.
- Machine wash contaminated clothes in hot water and soap, adding one cup of chlorine bleach to the wash water.
- Throw out canned goods, herbs, vegetables and any other foods that may have been affected by floodwaters.
- If your freezer has lost power, move frozen food to a neighbour's freezer, or throw it out if you cannot keep it frozen.

- Articles such as stuffed toys and paper goods contaminated by floodwaters should be discarded because they cannot be properly sanitized. Items of particular value that show no visible contamination pose a minimal risk once they are completely dry.
- Minor debris can be left out for regular garbage pickup.

Before moving back in

- If appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes or fuse/breaker panels have been flooded, do not energize or return to service until they have been inspected by a licensed electrical contractor.
- If they have been soaked, replace the furnace blower motor, switches and controls, insulation and filters. Inspect all flooded forced air heating ducts and return duct pans and have them cleaned out or replaced. Replace insulation inside water heater, refrigerators and freezers if it has been wet.
- Flush and disinfect floor drains and sump pits using diluted chlorine bleach, and scrub them to remove greasy dirt and grime.

Repairing sewer lines

The City regularly cleans the sewer system. They are inspected and monitored using closed circuit television. Repairs are completed if problems are found, but unanticipated problems can occur, occasionally resulting in the backup of water or sewage. The City has expert staff on duty at all times to respond to these situations.

City response to a sewer backup or flood:

1. City staff will check the sewer pipe near your house to make sure that it is working properly. If the problem is in the City's sewer line, it will be fixed as soon as possible.
2. If the problem is not in the sewer, City staff can help you at no charge to identify the problem in your home's connection to the sewer, if resources allow.
3. If the problem is in the houses wastewater drain system you will be advised to contact a plumber.
4. If the problem is in one of the lines connecting to the main sewer, repairs may be the building owner's responsibility, the City's responsibility, or a combination of the two.

Responsibility can only be assigned after City staff have reviewed all data.

Property owners who have incurred damages to their home or contents should contact their insurance company for assistance. Your insurer normally submits a claim to the City for investigation and response, on your behalf.