

Sewer Lateral Inspection and Renewal Program FAQs

WHAT IS THE SEWER LATERAL INSPECTION AND RENEWAL PROGRAM?

Under this program, the City will inspect and, if necessary, repair the public side of sewer laterals that have a history of blockages dating to 2008 and no record of being repaired.

WHAT IS A SEWER LATERAL?

The lateral is the line, typically a 6-inch clay pipe, which conveys the wastewater from the interior of a property to the main public sewer line under the street or sidewalk. The City is responsible for the lateral from the cleanout or the property line to the sanitary sewer main. The property owner is responsible for the lateral from the home to the cleanout or property line.

WHAT IS A CLEANOUT?

A cleanout is an access point in your sewer lateral that enables access to the lateral for inspection or to clear obstructions in the public side of the line. The cleanout is usually located on your property, at or near the property line. Many properties do not have external cleanouts; instead their cleanout is inside the building, usually in the basement.

WHY DO SEWER LATERALS IN BALTIMORE CITY HAVE BLOCKAGES?

Most of the sewer laterals in the City were installed at the time the original residences were constructed. They are part of a wastewater system in the City that is, on average, 80 years old. Over time, some of these sewer laterals cracked, developed separated joints, or experienced blockages from tree roots entering through cracks or offset joints. This deterioration has led to lateral blockages, and in some instances, sewage backups into basements.

HOW WILL THE PROGRAM WORK?

Approximately 9,000 properties have one or more lateral blockages on record since 2008. Every sewer lateral in the backlog will be evaluated with a closed circuit TV inserted through the cleanout. Where a cleanout is not available, crews will insert a lateral launch camera through the sewer main. Engineers will be able to determine what defects, if any, exist in the laterals and any necessary repairs or maintenance will be scheduled.

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HOW WERE THE INSPECTIONS SCHEDULED?

The backlog of properties has been prioritized, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, based on the greatest concentration of known problems. It will take approximately five years to complete the backlog.

WHAT SORT OF CORRECTIVE ACTION MIGHT BE TAKEN AS A RESULT OF THESE INSPECTIONS?

Some laterals may need to be lined or repaired by contractors. Other defects may require the lateral to be replaced. Other defects may be remediated by routine cleaning or through root control.

HOW MUCH WILL THE PROGRAM COST?

The City will spend approximately \$500,000 per year, over five years on the inspection phase of the program. Repair, replacement and other corrective actions will cost about \$4 million per year.

WHAT ABOUT PROBLEMS ON THE PRIVATE SIDE OF THE LINES?

Property owners will receive a letter notifying them if the City inspections reveal defects on the private side of the sewer lateral. It is up to the private property owner to pursue corrections to those problems.

HOW CAN YOU AVOID A BLOCKED SEWER LATERAL?

- 💧 Hire a licensed plumber to inspect your private sewer lateral; periodic condition inspection is your best protection.
- 💧 Repair or replace damaged laterals, cleanouts and caps.
- 💧 Avoid planting trees or shrubs with deep roots close to your sewer lateral.
- 💧 Periodically add a root-growth preventative to your drains.
- 💧 Do not dispose of fats, oils, and grease (FOG) in sinks or toilets. Instead, drain FOG into cans or other containers that you can throw out with the trash.

- 💧 Do not flush anything down your toilet other than poop, pee, and toilet paper. Even those 'flushable' wipes create sewer line blockages.
- 💧 Minimize the use of your kitchen garbage disposal. Place baskets or strainers in sink drains to catch food scraps, and dispose of them in the trash or compost pile.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR SEWER LATERAL BECOMES BLOCKED?

Call 311 immediately.

Completely stop using any water in the house, such as sinks, showers, washing machines, and dishwashers.

Locate your cleanout and point it out to the DPW maintenance crew.



A sewer cleanout in a yard.

If it is determined that the sewer blockage is on the private side of the lateral, hire a licensed plumber to inspect and repair the lateral.

For more information, call 311 or email Publicworks@baltimorecity.gov.