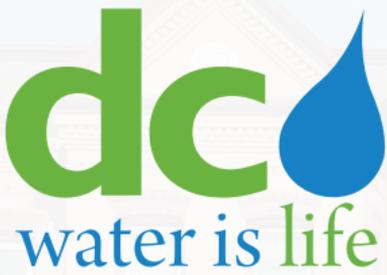


a guide to  
**PREVENTING  
SEWER BACKUPS  
AND FLOODING**





Sewer backups and flooding can damage District homes and businesses. Sewer blockages are most commonly found in private service lines but they can also be the result of problems in the main sewer line in the street. Blockages are often caused by soil settlement, misaligned joints, root infiltration, pipe collapses, grease buildup, or by other items that have been flushed down a drain.

Flooding results when the volume of water runoff from a storm is greater than a drainage system's capacity. When this occurs, two types of problems can result—(1) the overland flow of stormwater enters a property through an opening such as a door, window, or cracks in the building's foundation, or (2) when heavy rains increase the water elevation in the sewer system and cause it to backflow through the sewer pipeline and into a home or business. The latter is more common in the area of the city where the sewer system is combined, that is, the sewer pipe conveys both sanitary waste and stormwater. Either of these problems can lead to costly damage and cleanup.



### **If Your Sewer Backs Up During a Rainstorm**

Report all sewer backups as soon as possible to DC Water's Water and Sewer Emergency Line at **(202) 612-3400**. Move valuables to upper floors of your home, and notify your insurance company if damage does occur.

### **Who is Responsible for Sewer Cleanup and Repairs**

Cleanup and damages are the responsibility of the property owner. DC Water does not pay for damage or cleanup costs that result from sewer backups or flooding following a heavy rainstorm. If you believe DC Water is responsible you may call **(202) 787-2052** for instructions on how to file a claim.

### **Flood-prone Areas in the District**

Neighborhoods in the District such as the west side of Florida Avenue between the Anacostia River and 1st Street, NW have historically experienced sewer backups and flooding due to the bowl-like (low-lying) topography and the inadequate capacity of the sewers, some of which were constructed in the late 19th century.

Other flood-prone areas in the District include:

- Rhode Island Ave. and 5th St., NE and Rhode Island Metro
- Thomas and Flagler streets, NW
- West Virginia Ave. and Mount Olivet St., NE
- 1st and P streets, NW
- 6th and R streets, NW

DC Water is in the early phase of a 20-year program to construct huge underground tunnels that will alleviate flooding in these areas. Until this program is completed, this brochure provides some important information designed to help home and business owners prevent the property damage associated with sewer backups and flooding.



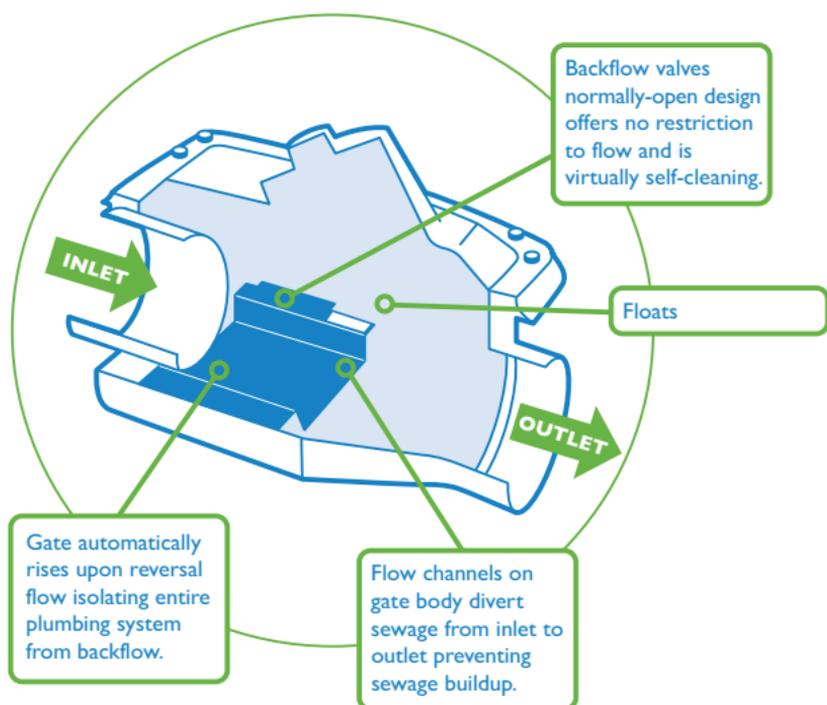


## Sewer Backup Insurance and Flood Insurance

Although sewer backup and flood insurance are relatively inexpensive, most people neglect to purchase protection. Homeowner insurance policies do not cover flood damage. DC Water recommends property owners consider the purchase of a policy or rider to your existing policy that covers the damage and cleanup cost that can result from sewer backups and flooding. Learn more about the National Flood Insurance Program at [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov).

## Backflow Prevention Devices

A common device called a Backflow Preventor (BFP) can be installed in your plumbing system by a licensed plumber, and can effectively shut off the home or business from the street sewer system during extreme sewage backups. Automatic and manual BFPs are available. However, if the device is closed, you must not use the toilet, sink, shower, washer, dishwasher or any appliance that discharges wastewater. If you have a BFP installed, be sure to inspect it regularly.



BACKFLOW PREVENTOR (BFP)

### **Sump Pumps**

A sump pump is a small pump that collects water from inside a structure and discharges it to the outside surface, usually through a small pipe. It is located in a basin under the basement floor and may collect excess groundwater from the surrounding soil. Routinely check the sump pump to ensure that it is plugged in and the breaker is on.



### **Gutters, Downspouts, Downspout Extensions, and Splash Pads**

Gutters, downspouts, downspout extensions and splash pads are important parts of any home or businesses drainage system and are essential for sending roof runoff away from the building. Gutters catch the water that runs off the roof and channels it into downspouts, which direct the flow of water to the ground. Downspouts should end in an elbow, which directs the flow of water onto a splash pad or into an extension. Splash pads are typically about two feet long and made of concrete or plastic. If a splash pad is not effective at moving stormwater far enough away from your home or building, a six-foot downspout extension may provide a better solution to the problem.

### **Exterior Concrete Slab with Drain**

If a house or building has a basement entrance that is located below ground, the landing slab should be constructed of concrete, have a drain, and sit above a gravel base. The drain should discharge into a sump pump well (but never directly into the sewer system) so it can be pumped away. Keep the drain clear of leaves, trash, and debris.

### **Land or Lot Grading**

The ten feet of ground closest to the house should slope down at least six inches away from the structure to keep water from seeping into the basement or flooding the foundation. However, keep soil at least eight inches away from wood siding to protect against rot and insects.

### **Window Wells**

Designed to create an opening around your basement window, window wells are below ground level, U-shaped, and may be brick or manufactured from rust resistant metal. To keep rain, snow, yard waste, animals and people from falling into the well, seal them with watertight window well covers.

### **Barriers**

Permanent concrete barriers constructed around basement entrances and windows built below street level, can effectively direct overland water flows away from a building.

### **Sand Bags**

By diverting moving water away from buildings, properly filled and placed sandbags can be an effective method of preventing flood damage. Untied burlap bags filled halfway with sandy soil and positioned tightly against one another can be placed in appropriate locations such as basement stairways and window wells. Never use bags to build a fortress around your property. This can trap water between the sandbags and the building, causing even further damage.





**Regular Maintenance Can Prevent Future Flooding and Damage to Your Home or Business**

DC Water recommends that you regularly complete necessary maintenance to your home or business drainage system. If sewage is backing up in your home, call DC Water immediately on its 24-hour Water and Sewer Emergency Line at **(202) 612-3400**. An inspector will be dispatched to investigate the public sewer and determine the cause of the backup. If the public sewer is clear, you will be advised to call a licensed plumber and have your private sewer service line cleared.



## IMPORTANT NUMBERS TO KNOW

DC Water and Sewer Emergency Line ..... **(202) 612-3400**

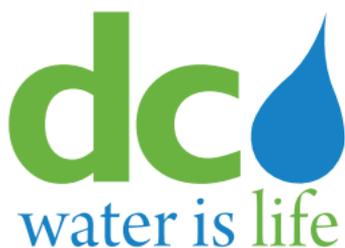
DC Water Office of Risk Management ..... **(202) 787-2052**

Homeland Security and Emergency  
Management Agency ..... **(202) 727-6161**

Mayor's Citywide Call Center ..... **(202) 727-1000**

Federal Emergency Management Agency ..... **(800) 621-3362**

National Flood Insurance ..... **(888) 379-9531**



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