



## **Sanitary Sewer Service**

# **What Customers Need to Know**

 **Evansville WATER AND SEWER UTILITY**

Nearly 60,000 customers in Evansville and Vanderburgh County are connected to the sanitary sewer system that is maintained and serviced by the Evansville Water and Sewer Utility. The Utility is responsible for more than 800 miles of sewer main lines in the street, or located off property owner boundaries or within easements.

Property owners are responsible for maintaining the sewer line running between their home's or building's exterior and the property line.

The information in this brochure is specific to your sewer service and summarizes your responsibilities as an Evansville Water and Sewer Utility customer. This document applies to all Utility customers — residential, commercial, industrial and public authority.

It is presented in a FAQ format to help you find answers to common questions, and we suggest you keep it handy for reference.

**Topics include:**

- Your responsibility as a property owner.
- How to prevent sewer line backups.
- What to do in a sewer backup emergency.
- Becoming familiar with the Utility's easement restrictions.

The Utility Board has adopted and approved other rules, which can be found in the Sewer Handbook on the Utility's website — [www.ewsu.com/notices](http://www.ewsu.com/notices)

If you have any questions about your sewer service or need information about rates, please contact Evansville Water and Sewer Utility Customer Service at **(812) 436-7846**, [ewsucustomerservice@ewsu.com](mailto:ewsucustomerservice@ewsu.com) or visit [www.ewsu.com](http://www.ewsu.com).

*Este informe contiene información muy importante sobre su sistema de alcantarillado. Tradúzcalo o hable con alguien que lo entienda bien.*

## Customer service

Providing you reliable customer service is a priority. If you have questions about your service or bill, or need more information beyond what is available in this guide, please contact our team of customer service professionals. They are available to assist you during normal business hours — 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (closed for holidays). Please call **(812) 436-7846** or email [ewsucustomerservice@ewsu.com](mailto:ewsucustomerservice@ewsu.com).

## Sewer service emergency

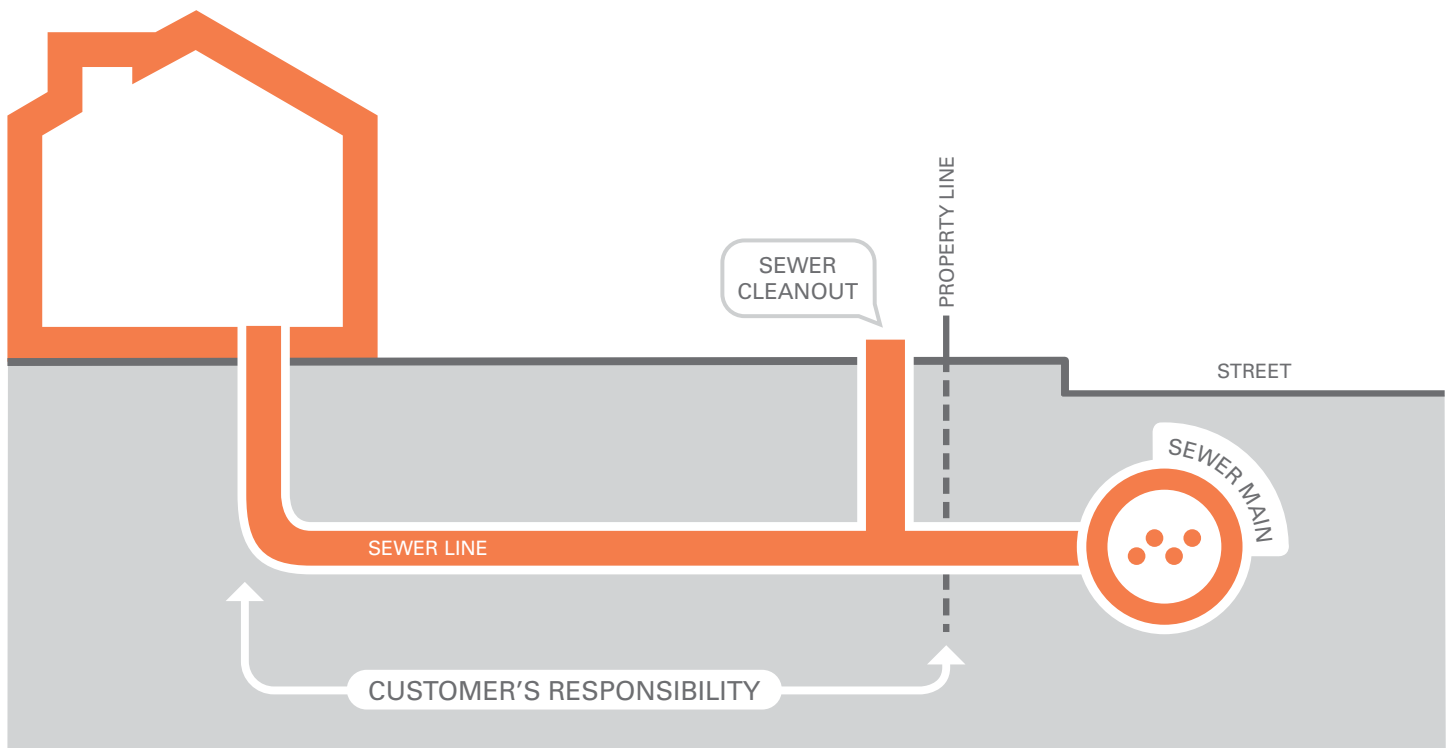
If you have a sewer service emergency, please contact our dispatcher at **(812) 421-2130**. The dispatch office is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If the dispatcher is not available when you call, please leave a voice mail message, including your name, phone number and a brief description of the emergency.

## Property owner's responsibility

Property owners are responsible for maintaining the sewer line running between your home's or building's exterior and the property line.

In most cases, sewer service lines were put in place at the time the home was originally built. Depending on the age of your home, your sewer lines may have gone through years, or even decades, of seasonal

changes, root invasions or cumulative blockages. Sewer lines are vulnerable to clogs and blockages caused by a variety of sources, such as tree roots, pipe collapse and common waste. These blockages can occur at any time, usually without advance notice, and can create problems with your sewer service.





# Frequently Asked Questions

## Responsibilities

### What are property owners responsible for?

As property owner, you are responsible for maintaining sanitary sewer service lines located on your property for which you have ownership rights. This includes the sewer line running between the home's or building's exterior and the property line. (See illustration on previous page.)

Your maintenance responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the intrusion of tree roots into

the sewer line. Also, you are responsible for the maintenance of all plumbing within the home.

### Which sewer lines are maintained and repaired by the Evansville Water and Sewer Utility?

Evansville Water and Sewer Utility owns and is responsible for maintaining the sewer main in the street and any portion of the sewer service line located off your property or within easements.

## Parts of the sewer system

### What is a sanitary sewer main?

A sanitary sewer main is a pipe located in the street, back easement or side easement that is specifically designed to transport wastewater from homes and businesses to the Utility's wastewater treatment plants. Sanitary sewer main lines are owned, operated and maintained by the Evansville Water and Sewer Utility.

### What is a sanitary sewer service line?

A sanitary sewer service line (also called a lateral) is the pipe that carries wastewater from your home or building to the sanitary sewer main. The property owner owns and maintains the sanitary sewer service line from the house or building to where it connects to the sanitary sewer main line.

### What is a Utility easement and its related restrictions?

An easement is a right to cross or otherwise use someone else's land for a specified purpose. A Utility easement is a specific area of property the Utility may use and access. Having an easement gives the Utility the right to use the land, but the Utility does not own it.

The area covered by the easement is usually clearly outlined, and the easement is part of the property so that easement rights will continue even after the property is transferred or sold.

The property owner may encounter certain restrictions on land use in an area covered by a Utility easement. For example, sewer lines and manholes, plus lines from other utilities, are

frequently installed in the back of the property rather than in the street. In those situations, the Utility has an easement, which gives the Utility the right to access the sanitary sewer lines and manholes for inspections, cleaning and/or repairs.

A property owner cannot block the Utility's access to the sewer line or manholes. Typical examples include fences or storage buildings that are blocking the Utility's access to a manhole or sewer line that requires inspection, cleaning or repair. The property owner is responsible, at his or her expense, for removing any fencing, storage, landscaping, etc., that is blocking access. If a property owner does not remove the obstruction within 20 days following written notice, the Utility will pursue legal proceedings necessary to have the obstruction removed at the homeowner's or property owner's expense, and the Utility will not be liable for any damage that may occur as a result of removing the obstruction.

### What is a cleanout?

A cleanout is an access point in the sanitary sewer service line from which a plumber may clear out obstructions in the line. The cleanout is generally located in the front of the property, near the property line. The cleanout also may be located in a back or side yard.

Not all properties have a cleanout. If there is no cleanout, a plumber may be able to access the sewer line from a toilet. If that is not possible, the plumber may need to dig an access point to your lateral sewer line.

## Sewer maintenance and repairs

### What can you do to protect your property?

Take these steps to protect your home and the sanitary system:

- Keep your sewer pipes in good working order, free from collapse, tree roots, debris, fats, oils, greases and other substances that can lead to blockages.
- Be aware of what items are flushed or put down the sink. Small items (like children's toys) can cause blockages when they accumulate.
- Repair any cracks or holes in basement walls or floors.
- Disconnect downspouts, and instead direct water onto your lawn and away from your home.
- Ensure lot grading directs water away from your foundation.
- Consider using a rain barrel to collect rainwater.

Protection of your home or building and its contents should always involve insurance coverage. Your insurance company may reimburse costs incurred from sewer water damages — subject to limitations and conditions in your insurance policy.

Home insurance policies do not automatically contain sewer backup coverage, so be sure to review your policy and speak with your insurance representative today to understand how your property is covered. Don't wait until after a sewer backs up or your property sustains damage to find out if you have coverage.

### What is a sewer backup?

A sewer backup occurs when there is a blockage of some kind in either the sewer main or the sewer service line. Blockages prevent the flow of wastewater from your home to the sewer main. Sewer backups also can be caused when sewer pipes have reached maximum capacity.

**Things that cause sewer backups include:**

- Common household waste.
- Root invasion.
- Pipe collapse.
- Heavy rainfalls or intense storms.

- Inflow and infiltration, which is excess groundwater, storm water and downspout discharge flowing into sewer pipes. Often, this is the result of holes, cracks, pipe joint failures or faulty connections. Most inflow and infiltration issues are caused by aging infrastructure that needs maintenance or replacement.
- Excess water from illegal connections.

### What should I do if I experience a sewer backup?

First, determine whether or not the problem is internal by checking all drains. When only one drain is affected, it is possible the drain trap or the line leading from the drain is clogged and needs to be cleaned by a commercial cleaner and/or rodding cable.

Next, if all drains are not draining, immediately call the Evansville Water and Sewer Utility dispatcher at (812) 421-2130. A Sewer Utility crew will come to your home or business to determine if the Utility's sewer main is blocked or if your sewer service line is blocked. A crew will be assigned on a first-available basis. The arrival time of the crew varies based on the number of cases the Utility is processing. There are usually numerous cases during heavy rains. There is no charge for this service call.

If the problem is detected in the Utility's sewer main, the Utility will clear the blockage at no expense to you. If no problem is detected in the Utility's sewer main, our crew will advise you to call a plumber to research what is causing the sewer backup in your service line. The cost of repairs to the property owner's sanitary sewer service line is at the property owner's expense.

If you are not available when the crew completes its inspection or repair, the crew will place a door hanger on your front door. The door hanger has information about what action was or needs to be taken.

A sewer backup may occur during very large storms when sewer lines are full and the water cannot be cleared fast enough. The time it takes the sewer lines to clear is affected by the duration and amount of rain.

### **Will the Utility pay for repairs if I don't call the Utility first and the plumber made the repairs to the Utility's sewer main line?**

Any unauthorized repairs to the Utility's portion of the lines will be at the property owner's expense. A good rule of thumb is, "When in doubt, call the Sewer Utility first."

#### **The Utility is not responsible for covering payment of the following:**

- A rodding (cleaning) or an excavation for a blockage that occurs within your area of responsibility.
- An installation of a cleanout.
- An excavation that occurs in the Utility's area of responsibility that is done without obtaining written approval from the Utility.
- An obstruction cleared, which was the result of a prohibited substance. See "Rules and recommendations."
- Televising (video images) of the sewer lateral.

### **How do I select a plumber?**

Here are some suggested guidelines to consider when selecting a plumber.

- The plumber should:
  - Be bonded.
  - Be insured.
  - Be willing to provide a warranty.
  - Be willing to provide references.
  - Provide a price range before the work is completed.
- Always consider bids from multiple plumbers.

### **What flood prevention devices can I use?**

Consider installing a backwater valve. A backwater valve (also known as a check valve and backflow prevention device) is placed at the exit point of the sanitary pipe under your home or building. Under normal conditions, the valve allows wastewater to flow from your property out to the main sanitary sewer at the street. In conditions when wastewater flows back toward your home or building, the valve closes and prevents it from re-entering.

This may seem like the perfect solution to a backflow event; however, there are limitations to the effectiveness and ease of use of these devices:

- Once the backwater valve is closed (or in check), wastewater cannot escape to the sewer system unless the pressure from your plumbing is higher than the outside pressure in your sewer lateral line. That means you cannot bathe, shower, wash clothes, run the dishwasher, flush the toilet or put anything in the system until the conditions causing the backflow have been eliminated and the valve returns to its normal position.
- For the device to work properly, the valve must be placed outside the last exit point of the sanitary sewer pipe from your home. Be mindful the valve can be affected by grease build-up and debris, which can cause the device to not close when necessary.

Contact a licensed plumber if you need assistance.

### **What can I do about sewer gas odor?**

Floor drains are typical sources of sewer gas odor. Periodically, you should fill floor drain traps with water to avoid sewer gas odor problems. One or two gallons of water will normally suffice.

## Rules and recommendations

### What is not allowed to be discharged into the sanitary system?

The following substances are examples of liquids or materials that are prohibited from being sent into the sanitary sewer service line:

- Gasoline or other flammable liquids, solids or gases.
- Garbage not properly shredded by a disposal unit.
- Ashes, cinders, sand, mud, straw, shavings, metal, glass, tar, wood, or other solid or sticky substances capable of causing obstruction to the sewer service line or the main sewer line.
- Common household grease from cooking.

Individuals who send prohibited liquids or materials into the system may be subject to fines.

### What are some tips for maintaining my sanitary sewer service line?

Consider these guidelines:

- Be careful about what enters the sewer service line. Grease, oils, sand, mud, silt or solid objects are capable of causing sewer blockages with your internal pipes and your sewer lateral line.
- Make sure no storm water connections or cross-connections (such as sump pumps, gutter drains, footing drains or storm run-offs) are made to the sewer service lines.

- Avoid planting fast-rooting trees, such as willows, elms or maples near your sewer service lines. These types of trees are attracted to moist areas. Their roots may grow into, and ultimately obstruct, the sewer lines, especially clay pipe sewer lines.
- Make sure the sewer service line is properly vented. Usually, a vent stack exits the roof and must be kept clear of bird nests and debris.
- Use sink strainers and keep disposals in working order to prevent large pieces of waste from entering the sewer line.

### What are illegal sanitary sewer connections?

Illegal connections are downspouts, sump pumps, footing tiles, drains from window wells and drains from driveways that send storm water into the separate sanitary sewer system. These connections are strictly prohibited by city ordinance. These illegal connections can and do cause sewer backups during rain or snow events.

### Where can I find additional rules and regulations related to the sewer system?

Additional sewer rules and regulations are outlined in the Evansville Municipal Code. Find a link to the code at [www.ewsu.com/SewerCustomer](http://www.ewsu.com/SewerCustomer). The codes that apply to the Utility are found in Title 13 – Public Utilities and Services. Under Title 13, click Chapter 13.05 to find ordinances related to residential and commercial sewer customers.



## Always contact Indiana 811 before you dig

Before you dig on your property, call Indiana 811 to have a professional locate and mark the areas on your property where various utility lines and pipes are located. The location of utility lines, pipes and easements can restrict construction, landscaping and other activities on your property. For example, a swimming pool could not be placed where there is a buried line.

Visit [www.Indiana811.org](http://www.Indiana811.org) or call (800) 382-5544.



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