Collection Questions

Q: What is a Wastewater Collection System?
A: The wastewater collection system is a system of pipes that transport wastewater (also called sanitary sewer) from a source, such as a residence, commercial business, or industrial plant, to a wastewater treatment plant. The wastewater treatment plant properly treats the wastewater so that it is safe to discharge to the environment

Q: What is a private service line?
A: A private service line is a pipe that connects the resident's house to the City's wastewater sewer main. It is located on the resident's property and it is the responsibility of the resident to maintain the private service line. The Pueblo Municipal Code of Ordinance states:

> **Sec. 16-3-8. Ownership and responsibility.**
> Owners of properties served by sanitary sewers shall own all of the service lines or building sewers that connect structures on the property to the public sewer, including the tap itself. Property owners shall be responsible for maintaining, repairing or replacing service lines and building sewers at their sole expense. (Ord. No. 8147 §1, 2-22-10)

Q: What if the private service line is broken in the City's right of way or easement?
A: If your private service line is broken in the City right of way or easement call a licensed plumber to perform any necessary repairs. The City will be notified when the plumber obtains a permit to make the repairs, allowing the City to inspect the tap and Regional Building to inspect the service line. All costs are the responsibility of the property owner.

Easements are set aside for installation and maintenance by public and private utility operators. Sanitary Sewer Easement is needed for the maintenance, repair or rehabilitation of the sanitary sewers. Encroachments limit the City's ability to maintain, repair or rehabilitate sanitary sewers.

Q: How can I prevent sanitary sewer backups or overflows?
A: Most sanitary sewer backups or overflows are caused by fats, oils, or grease being put into the sink. Residents can prevent backups and overflows by disposing of fats, oils, and grease in the garbage and avoiding the use of the garbage disposal to put foods down the drain. Vegetables, meat scraps, butter, cooking oils, and many other foods deposit grease and solids that can build up in pipes eventually creating blockages. The fats, oils, and grease harden when they go down the drain and clog pipes in the same manner that cholesterol clogs arteries in humans. Instead of putting food waste into a garbage disposal, scrape food waste from plates and pans into the garbage. Let melted oils used for cooking solidify in a container before placing them in the garbage.

Sanitary sewer backups and overflows are also caused by roots or collapsed service pipes. Know where your private service line is located and avoid planting trees and shrubs near it. Roots can creep into the sewer pipe joints and eventually cause a blockage. The best way to remove roots is to call a professional sewer cleaning service. The service pipe may need to be replaced if the pipe is cracked or collapsed.

Q: Why are sanitary sewer backups or overflows bad?
A: Sanitary sewer backups and overflows are harmful to humans and the environment because of the pollutants contained in sewage. When sanitary sewer overflows, contaminants are released into the environment. Untreated wastewater is harmful to humans because these contaminants can spread disease or pollute the waterways. They are harmful for the environment because they deplete oxygen in streams that fish and the insects they eat, need to survive.

Q: What if I have sewer odor in my house?
A: The most likely cause is a failed wax ring under the toilet, a dry trap under a sink or tub, or a broken pipe in a wall or under the home. Run fresh water in all sinks to fill traps inside the house. If this does not cure the problem, check the toilet and make sure it is firmly attached to the floor, the wax seal around the toilet may be compromised. If this does not work call a plumber immediately. Sewer gas may be harmful if breathed over a period of time.

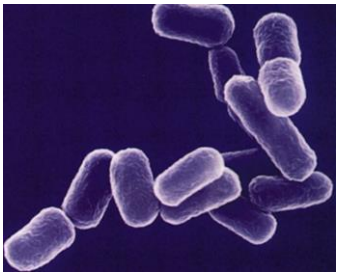
Q: What is a "cleanout"?
A: A clean out is an access point to the private service line (usually a white PVC pipe with a cap to clean and maintain the service line). It is the responsibility of the property owner to keep all cleanouts in good working condition and water-tight.

Q: What if I do not have a cleanout?
A: Call qualified plumber to install a cleanout. This may save you money in the future by allowing a blockage to be cleared before damaging your home or business. The cleanout also allows periodic maintenance on your service lateral.

Q. What should I do if I see sewer water coming out of the ground or from a manhole?
A: Stay away from the water and call the Wastewater Department immediately.

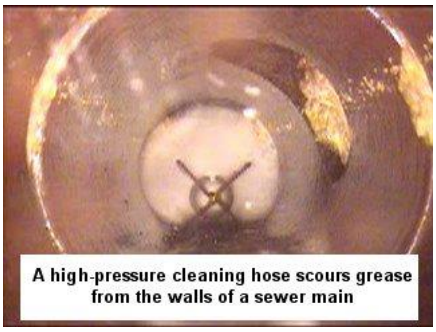
> **FOR PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR DURING NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS**, call 553-2898
>
> **FOR PROBLEMS THAT OCCUR DURING NIGHTS, WEEKENDS, OR HOLIDAYS**, call 553-2502

Q: Why do I get a terrible sewer odor coming from my drains when the cleaning trucks come out?
A: Sewage contains bacteria – the same bacteria that exist in your intestines - that use organics in water as their source of food. Many of these bacteria produce waste products that include sulfur, and sulfur compounds frequently have



unpleasant odors. For example, the chemical added to natural gas so you can smell gas leaks is a sulfur compound.

Sulfur-containing compounds are present in sewer pipes in the form of gasses as a result of bacterial action. In your home, drain pipes are designed to hold water. The purpose of holding water is to provide a barrier against gasses from the sewer coming back into the house. If a drain has not been used in some time, for example if you have been out of town or if there is an area of your house you do not use frequently, the drains may dry out allowing sewer gasses to enter the house.


A high-pressure cleaning hose scours grease from the walls of a sewer main

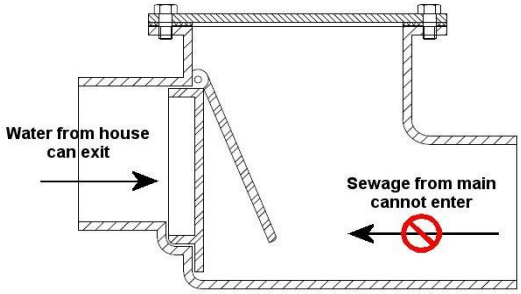
The sewer cleaning trucks use water under high pressure to scour materials off the pipe. Under some conditions the passage of the high-pressure cleaning head past your household tap can create a vacuum that sucks the water out of drain pipes, allowing gasses to pass through. This can be remedied simply by running water in the drain to re-fill it.

In some cases the pressure of the water used for cleaning can be lowered. However, this practice also results in less efficient cleaning of the sewer. If sewers are not thoroughly cleaned, materials can build up and block the sewer, resulting in sewage backing up into houses. As unpleasant as odors may sometimes be, a sewage backup is much more unpleasant.

Q: What is a backwater valve and how can I get one?
A: A backwater valve is a mechanical device that prevents wastewater from flowing into your house from the City's sewer main. Sewer mains can become blocked, causing wastewater to back up in the main and overflow into buildings or from manholes. See the diagram below showing how this happens.

A backwater valve is a "flapper valve" that has a flat flange hinged at the top. When you use water in your house, wastewater from your household drains push the flapper open and allow wastewater to flow to the City's sewer main. But if the City's main becomes plugged causing sewage to back up, the sewage flowing toward your house pushes the flapper closed so sewage cannot enter.

Most plumbers can install backwater valves. There are different types of backwater valves for installation inside or outside the home, depending on how the house and the plumbing are arranged. Houses with basements built in Pueblo after 1978 should



have had backwater valves installed. However, like all mechanical devices, backwater valves need periodic inspection and maintenance. Materials in household waste may get caught on the valve and block its operation. If a "sewer snake" has been used to clear a clogged drain line, the sewer snake could break the flapper valve or knock it off its hinge so it cannot operate. Homeowners should check their backwater valves about once a year to ensure they are in proper operating condition.