



## **HELP US HELP YOU RESPOND TO A SEWAGE BACKUP**

### **Steps Customers should take in preparation for arrival of The City of Calgary Water Services**

Water Services crews are available for initial investigation of sewer emergencies every day of the year. Sewer backup occurs when something blocks the normal flow of wastewater from your house to The City's sanitary sewer line. When this happens, foul water often comes up through the floor drain or toilet in your basement.

Before the Water Services crew arrives, the customer is asked to prepare the site so that crews can begin work as soon as they arrive. Working together ensures efficient and effective water service.

#### **The Customer is asked to:**

- **LOCATE THE CLEANOUT**

The cleanout provides access to the sewer line so clogs can easily be cleaned out. This opening is usually located in the basement or on the lowest level of the property. Look to see where the water service comes into the house. Both water and sanitary enter the house in the same location. You may find the cleanout in close proximity to the main water shut off valve.

- **PROVIDE ACCESS TO CLEANOUT OR STACK**

If the cleanout cannot be located in the floor, then it may be possible for the Water crew to work from a stack. The stack may be behind drywall. Note: It's not always possible to clear a clog through the stack.

**See photos and descriptions on following pages.**

## Step by Step Instructions

### Before Water Services crew arrive

- Clear a path to the cleanout so that crew has easy access to cleanout.
- Clean around the cleanout as best as possible to prevent further spread of organic waste.
- Clear an area roughly two meters/six feet in front of the cleanout in order for crews to operate their equipment
- If cleanout has been covered by carpet, false floor or dry wall the customer is responsible for providing access. If this is not possible, let us know the reason why so that we are prepared upon arrival.
- We will ask for written permission to remove possible obstruction. The Customer may provide permission or not.

### After Water Services crew arrive

- Customer will direct Water Services crew to cleanout
- Customer will stay with crew during the assessment.
- Water Services crew will attempt to open cleanout. If this is not possible then the Customer will be asked for written permission to remove cleanout cap.
- Water Services crew will run a steel snake to the sewer main to determine if the blockage is on private or public property; **if the blockage is diagnosed as being on private property, the customer will be advised to call a plumber.**
- The diagnostic test performed by our crews may clear the blockage or partial blockage found on your side of the private line; Water Services still advises you call a plumber.

### Follow-up

- The Customer will be asked to run water to verify that the obstruction is removed. This procedure may be repeated. The Customer's assistance is required to run the water.
- Water Services crew may request a plastic bag for removal of organic waste found inside the service.
- The Customer will receive a copy of the Customer Service Report (CSR). Information will be provided for Customer's future course of action.

**See photos and descriptions on following pages.**

## PHOTOS & DESCRIPTIONS

The Cleanout is usually located in the basement or on the lowest level of the property.

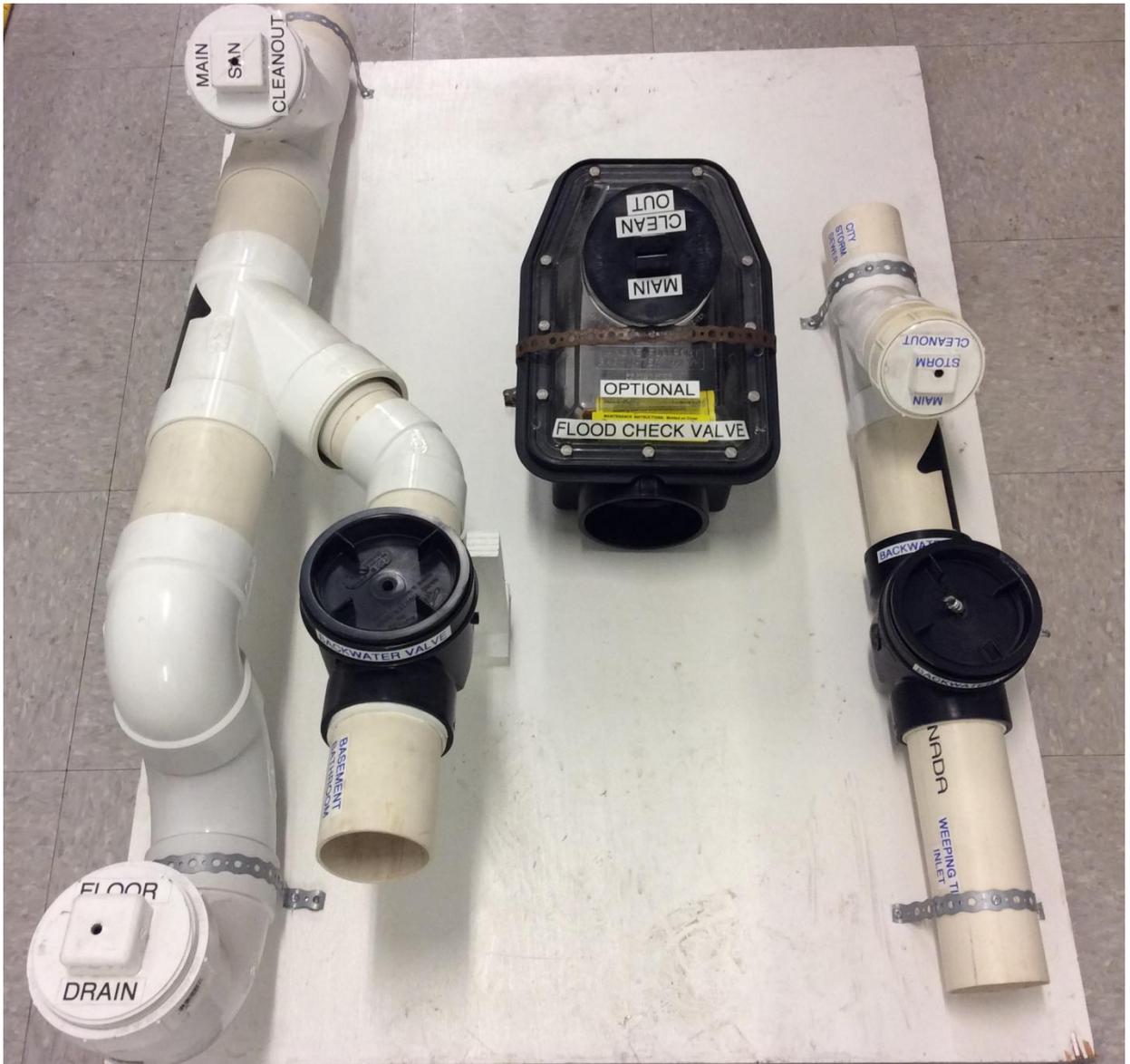


Figure 1 Cleanout in the floor



Figure 2: Cleanout

**Examples of Cleanouts and Floor Drains when they are not buried under the floor**



**Figure 3 Cleanouts and floor drain**

**Left** is a sanitary cleanout with a floor drain. Both floor drain and the main sanitary cleanout are located below floor level. They should not be covered but in many homes they have a carpet, wood or concrete over them. Sometimes people place a toilet on them – which should not be done. It is preferable for the floor drain to be open.

**Centre** is a modern transparent cleanout.

**Right** is a storm water cleanout

Look to see where the water service comes into the house. Both water and sanitary enter the house in the same location. You may find the cleanout in close proximity to the main water shut off valve



Figure 4: The cleanout may be in close proximity of the entrance of the water line as shown here

If the cleanout cannot be located in the floor, then it may be possible for our crew to work from a stack. This is how a stack may look and possible locations.



Figure 5: Sometimes this type of stack can be used, but in the interest of protecting your property from damage Water Services crews prefer to work from the cleanout.



Figure 6: Here is another example of a stack. The stack usually protrudes prominently above ground level.



Figure 7: The stack may be hidden behind drywall or under fillings. It is the customer's responsibility to locate and expose it. Relieving a choke from a stack is difficult; Water Services crew will determine the feasibility of doing so.

Equipment, such as this steel snake, is used by Water crews.



Figure 8: Water Services crew member displays the steel snake, a long coiled cable that is used to remove blockages.

## STEPS HOMEOWNER CAN TAKE TO PREVENT SEWAGE BACKUPS

Sanitary sewage backups and overflows can be caused by a number of factors. In the home plumbing system (household drains and toilets), the main cause is accumulation of fats, oil and grease\*, hair, dental floss, or solid materials such as disposable towels, disposable diapers and sanitary products which include sanitary wipes.

\*Do not pour fats, oil or grease down the drain. Prevent a blockage by using a paper towel to wipe excessive amounts of grease from dishes, pots and pans, before washing. Dispose of the paper towel in your garbage.

Call 311 to report a blockage or visit [Calgary.ca](http://Calgary.ca) for more information.

*This information is provided by The City of Calgary, Water Services, January 2016*