



Newsletter

Talk of the Town

1025 P Street
Gering, NE
(308) 436-5096

How to help prevent sewer backups and what to do if you have one

Nobody wants to experience a sewer backup in their home, and while they are not common, anyone who has had one will tell you they never want to go through it again.

What is a sewer backup?

A sewer backup is when wastewater and sewage reverse course and come up through a home's drains, toilets, or sinks, usually due to a blockage in the sewer line.

Immediate actions to take:

1. Stop water usage:

Turn off all water fixtures and the main water supply to prevent more water from entering the system.

2. Keep people and pets away:

Ensure children and pets are not near the affected area to prevent contact with contaminated water.

3. Turn off electricity:

If there is standing water in the area, turn off the electricity to avoid electrical shock.

4. Avoid direct contact:

Wear protective gear like rubber gloves and boots if you must enter the area.

5. Call for help:

Contact the City of Gering immediately if water is backing up in your basement. You can call the Communication Center after hours at (308) 436-6666. Additionally, contact a plumber and a professional sewage cleanup service as soon as possible.

Health Risks:

Exposure to raw sewage poses serious health risks.

- Thoroughly wash your hands immediately after handling anything contaminated with sewage.

Common Causes

Clogs: Blockages from solid materials, grease or hair are the most common causes.

Tree roots: Roots can invade and block sewer lines.

Homeowners Insurance

Most standard homeowners insurance policies do not cover damage caused by sewer backups. However, you may be able to add sewer backup coverage to your homeowner's policy. Contact your agent for more information.



What can you do to help prevent a sewer back up in your basement?

- **First, NEVER flush any products down the toilet except toilet paper.** Even though the packaging on flushable wipes indicates they are okay to flush, they can wreak havoc on your plumbing and potentially on a sewer main. The City strongly discourages flushing "flushable" wipes down the toilet.

- Do not flush facial tissue or paper towels down toilets. These products are designed to stay intact when wet and do not break down quickly in water, unlike toilet paper. This can lead to clogs in your plumbing and the sewer system. Use a trash can for paper products other than toilet paper.

- Never flush hygiene products or diapers down a toilet. They can cause expensive damage to the plumbing in your home and potentially create a disaster in the municipal sewer main. These items should be placed in a trash container.

- Don't flush things like oils, grease, hair, and non-flushable items down toilets and drains.

Regular maintenance:

Consider periodic sewer line cleaning or inspection by a professional.

Consequences of sewer backups:

- Flushing inappropriate items down the toilet can form clogs in your home's plumbing which can lead to a sewer backup in your basement. It can also cause damage to the City's sewer pumps, affecting wastewater flow in large areas of the city.

- Clearing blockages and repairing plumbing can lead to costly bills for both the homeowner and the municipality. Not to mention the cost of hiring a restoration service to mitigate the damage.

- Clogs can potentially lead to sewer overflows which can pollute rivers and bodies of water, causing harm to wildlife and water quality.



For more information, contact the City of Gering at 436-5096.

Gering City Council Members by Ward

Rebecca Shields - Ward I
Susan Wiedeman - Ward I

Michael Gillen - Ward II
Pam O'Neal - Ward II

Tamera Frye - Ward III
Julie Morrison - Ward III

James Jackson - Ward IV
B.J. Kinsey - Ward IV

Mayor - Kent Ewing



How can I protect my family from cross connections?

1. Check your water softener or other in-home treatment device to ensure that any drain lines have a proper air gap prior to entering the sewer line. The floor drain is considered a sewer line and there should be an air gap if the drain line runs into the floor drain.
2. Check all faucets where a hose might be connected and install a hose bib vacuum breaker to protect these connections.
3. Install a Pressure Vacuum Breaker on your underground sprinklers and have it tested annually when the sprinklers are turned on for the season.
4. If you have a boiler for home heating, make sure the fill line is protected with an approved backflow prevention assembly.
5. If you have old-style sinks or bathtubs, be sure to never fill them so the water level is higher than the fill spout.

HOW TO PREVENT ENTRY CONTAMINATION

When the hazard of contamination exists, effective steps should be taken to correct the condition. *If the condition cannot be corrected, then an appropriate backflow prevention device must be installed on the internal plumbing system.* This is generally the responsibility of the water user.

Everyone should want to eliminate possible cross connections. Those who drink water on your premises will likely be the first to be injured if water becomes contaminated in your system. An awareness of how contamination can enter a system is important. We must work together to keep everyone's

water safe. The people who are in charge of your public water supply system are aware of the dangers of cross connections. Your public water supply system has adopted a policy on cross connection control to comply with Nebraska regulations. One of the most effective and the most inexpensive controls is to always keep an air gap between any potential contaminant and the water system. Don't allow garden hoses or other hoses connected to the water system to drop into sources of contamination. Hydrants drain back even when shut off and contaminants can be siphoned into the hose or hydrant. If you need further information or need assistance in determining what devices are appropriate, contact your public water supply system.

BACKFLOW PREVENTION

What you can do to prevent cross connections and keep your drinking water safe.

1. **Check your faucets** to be sure that all faucet endpoints are above the flood level of the sink, tub, basin, or other apparatus they supply.
2. **Protect faucet extensions** by installing proper backflow prevention devices (i.e. hose bib vacuum breakers) on all faucets capable of having a hose or other extension attached.
3. **Check drain lines** (refrigerator drink dispensers, water softeners, heat exchangers, etc.) to be sure there is an adequate air gap between the drain line and the floor drain or sewer line into which they discharge.
4. **Never use unprotected faucets** to fill non-drinking water containers (water beds, wading pools, stock tanks, hot tubs, etc.). Following these guidelines and using common sense will help to eliminate the possibility of contaminating your drinking water, your neighbor's drinking water and your community's drinking water. This not only affects the residents of your community, but their visitors and those people who are passing through.



Common Backflow Preventers and Their Uses

REDUCED PRESSURE PRINCIPLE BACKFLOW PREVENTER

These assemblies are used in situations where a high hazard exists, and an air gap cannot be used. This can occur when water pressure is required beyond the point of protection. In this case, an air gap would not likely work well as water pressure can only occur beyond the air gap if a pump is installed to place the water back under pressure. These assemblies are not common in homes; although homes that are heated with boilers connected to the public water supply system will likely need one of these installed on the boiler feed line. As with the other assemblies, a reduced pressure principal backflow preventer will have to be tested on an annual basis by a licensed backflow tester to ensure it is operating properly.



SURVEY YOUR RESIDENCE

Homeowners should inspect their plumbing to determine if they have any of these devices or assemblies installed. If you do not have hose bibs with built-in protection or hose bib vacuum breakers installed, you can purchase these from your local hardware store or plumber and install them yourself. If you find one of the testable backflow preventers on your property, you should check with your water provider to determine if you need to have it tested on a routine basis, or if there is any regular maintenance that needs to be performed. Preventing backflow is the responsibility of all customers of the water system, and the safe water that results from installing proper protection benefits everyone.

**PROTECTING OUR
WATER IS A JOB FOR
EVERYONE**