

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – Q&A

SEWER BLOCKAGES

Council operates an extensive sewer system collecting and transporting wastewater (raw sewage) from residential, commercial and industrial properties to the sewer treatment plant.

This system is designed to treat degradable sewage only. Many substances can stick to or become caught in the sewer pipes and the system. Everything you put into the sewer has to be managed at some point by your local plumber or Council Staff.

These blockages can occur in your household sewer pipes, Council's sewer mains, pumping stations or the sewer treatment plant.

Where are my sewer pipes located?

The location of Council sewer mains and your property drainage can be hard to identify without plans, although you can usually find a sewer inspection shaft cover somewhere in your yard.

Council can provide you with a plan of your property showing where our sewer mains are located or you contact **Dial Before You Dig**.

Household internal drainage lines are not always available; however on request Council will search its records for details of household (internal) drainage lines which carry waste water to the sewer system or if available, a copy will be provided. There are associated fees and charges payable for this information.

Contact Councils Customer Service Centre on 02 6578 7290 for further information.

What happens when a blockage occurs?

This depends on the extent of the blockage. Some signs of a blockage include:

- toilets, sinks and tubs drain slower
- gurgling noises occur in sanitary drains
- gully traps in the yard overflow when the toilet is flushed or when basins or baths are released
- sewage overflows from the toilet or basin inside the house
- sewer maintenance holes overflow.



What causes blockages?

A sewer blockage; sometimes known as a sewer chock is a blockage in the sewer pipe. They usually occur when something inside the pipe stops it working properly.

Some causes of sewer blockage include:

- flushable wipes and sanitary pads/tampons
- rubbish, children's toys, tennis balls, nappies, clothing, cooking waste, sand, and other wastes not suitable for flushing into the sewer system
- tree roots infiltrating the property pipes

- crushed or flattened pipes that have been damaged
- pipes that have been laid poorly.

What can I do to prevent blockages and overflows?

There are some easy ways to prevent sewer blockages and overflows. Some of these are:

- Only flush toilet paper down the toilet. Put other items in the garbage, including 'flushable' wipes.
- Don't put food scraps, oil or cooking fats down the sink. These can solidify when they cool and cause blockages. Instead wipe pans with a paper towel and throw it in the bin.
- Don't bury sewer access points such as manholes, overflow relief gullies (ORG) or bolted trap screw (BTS) under gardens, driveways or lawns.
- Don't plant trees over the sewer pipes as the roots get in and cause blockages.

It is illegal to direct stormwater downpipes into the sewerage system. A rapid influx of water during a storm event may cause an overflow in your local environment or worse case, into your home.

Find out more about stormwater and your sewer [here](#).

What should I do if I have a sewer blockage?

If you are experiencing problems with your sewer, such as gurgling noises, sinks and toilets are slow to drain or effluent is overflowing from your internal or external gully, follow these steps:

Step One - Locate the sewer inspection shaft, this is the pipe that leads to the sewer main. It should be flush to the ground and the lid is about the size of a bread and butter plate. Usually in the front or back yard.

Step Two - Unscrew or lift the lid, if the sewer inspection shaft is full or overflowing or you

feel any pressure when trying to remove the lid, stop immediately and do not proceed any further.

If the sewer inspection shaft is clear, run an internal tap and see if the water reaches the shaft or causes water to fill up the shaft contact a licensed plumber to attend and inspect the internal drains for a blockage.



What if I call a plumber and the sewer blockage is in Council's pipes?

In the event of a sewer blockage, the property owner must contact a licensed plumber in the first instance to identify the cause.

If the blockage is located within the property owner's area of responsibility, the property owner is responsible for the costs of clearing the blockage and any associated repairs to the private plumbing.

If the plumber believes the blockage is within Council's area of responsibility, the plumber or owner must contact Council as soon as possible to arrange for our Network Operators to attend the site and carry out the appropriate work.

Council will liaise with the plumber or owner, as required in relation to the blockage, location and our intention regarding the problem. If the blockage is actually located in Council's area of responsibility, we will reimburse reasonable charges from the plumber in attending the site.

For further information, refer to Council's [Sewer Supply Services Policy](#).



What are my responsibilities for maintenance and repairs?

The property owner is responsible for maintaining and repairing the sewer pipes, fixtures and fittings inside the property up to and including the point of connection with Council's sewer system.

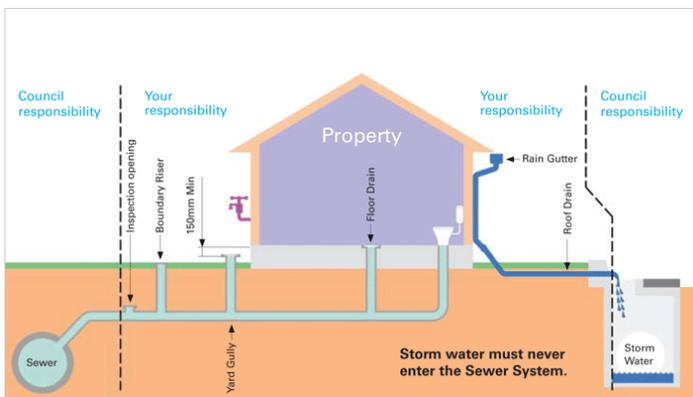
It is possible that the point of connection with our sewer system is outside your property. If you do not know where the point of connection is, you should contact Council's Customer Service Centre on 02 6578 7290 during business hours.

Any pipes and fittings on the property owner's side of the connection point including the boundary trap and inspection shaft are the responsibility of the property owner. This means any repairs, replacement or maintenance costs associated with these pipes and fittings are the responsibility of the property owner.

In the majority of circumstances, upon notification, Council staff will attend a property if the sewer inspection shaft is full or overflowing, as this may indicate that there is a blockage in the sewer main or branch line.

Council does not maintain or repair:

- private sewer services connecting to an onsite sewerage management system
- faults caused by willful or negligent damage.



What is an Overflow Relief Gully (ORG) and what do they look like?

An ORG is a drain like device located outside your home that protects the inside of your home from sewer overflows, allowing any backed up sewage to escape outside to the garden. The shape and size can vary greatly, but is generally 100mm to 150mm in diameter and made of plastic, victaulic clay or metal alloy with a grate like appearance.

Do all homes have an Overflow Relief Gully (ORG)?

Most homes constructed after 1976 have an ORG, surrounded in concrete or near and external wall. Buildings prior to this do not have an ORG unless work has been carried out since 1976. Council strongly recommend that all homes have an ORG installed by a licensed plumber.

Further information on your overflow relief gully and how to protect your home from sewer overflows can be found [here](#) or visit www.singleton.nsw.gov.au



Do trees or gardens cause damage to sewer pipes?

Some species of trees and shrubs are not suitable for planting near sewer pipes, their roots can infiltrate and eventually destroy pipes, causing significant and costly repairs. Roots anchor and support trees and shrubs but also see out and supply moisture and nutrients for growth.

Find out more about tree roots, plants and the sewer system [here](#) or visit www.singleton.nsw.gov.au

What is Council doing to manage blockages in the sewer system?

Council is committed to managing the sewer network and controlling blockages, to minimise public health risks and to protect our natural environment. We do this by:

- Maintaining and repairing the sewer network by repairing broken pipes and maintenance holes and undertaking regular maintenance inspections
- Renewing old pipes and pump stations
- Monitoring the network to identify areas with high stormwater inflow
- Educating residents and the community by providing information and advice promoting water conservation and healthy sewers.

RELATED INFORMATION

- [Tree Roots and the Sewer System Fact Sheet](#)
- [Overflow Relief Gully: Protecting the Sewer System Fact Sheet](#)
- [Protecting the Sewer System Fact Sheet](#)
- [Water and Sewer Group Customer Service Plan](#)

Sewer blockages create environmental damage, blocked property drains and overload the

sewer system. By working together we can help keep the sewerage system healthy and reduce blockages.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on a healthy sewer system contact Council on:

T. 02 6578 7290

E. council@singleton.nsw.gov.au

W. www.singleton.nsw.gov.au

