

## **CITY OF ALMA SANITARY SEWER BACKUP RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

The City of Alma has a critical responsibility to maintain the sanitary sewer systems of the City—both to protect citizens and City property that may be damaged in the case of sanitary sewer backups, and to reduce the City's exposure to costly claims and litigation.

The City has a duty of care to assure that:

- its sewers have been correctly designed and installed at the time of initial construction,
- the system is adequately maintained through maintenance and repair,
- an emergency response plan is in place in case of sewer blockage and backup, and
- any property owners affected by sewer backups receive the information and support they need.

The frequency of sewer backup problems has increased in many communities during the last few years. Statistics report that more than 400,000 sanitary sewer overflows occur annually in the United States. This policy is intended to help develop or strengthen the City's plan for prevention of such incidents and for control of general liability losses.

### **Sewer Backup Management Guidelines**

It is the accepted responsibility of the City of Alma to adequately preserve the integrity of its municipal sewer system. Sewers must be kept in good repair and free from obstructions that may hinder the system and cause damage, financial loss or inconvenience to citizens.

All personnel from the Public Works Department are expected to follow the procedures outlined in this policy, fulfilling their duty to prevent sewer backup incidents to the best of their ability.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Public Services to assure that appropriate personnel are adequately trained and held accountable for following all required sewer backup prevention procedures.

### **Preventive Maintenance Guidelines**

#### **Sewer Use Regulations:**

All restaurants, laundromats, medical facilities, and other appropriate commercial facilities are required to install and properly maintain grease traps (at minimum, applicable to all new or repaired connections). All property owners are prohibited from directing sump pumps, catch basins, various storm water collection systems, and downspouts into the sanitary sewer system. All vehicular repair facilities, oil change establishments, applicable business and industrial establishments are required to install as well as properly and routinely maintain oil-water separation systems (at minimum, applicable to all new or repaired connections).

Under NO circumstances, shall sanitary sewage be disposed of or deposited onto ground surface or into a storm water system. The requirements of this regulation should be clearly communicated to all property owners/residents on a periodic basis.

## **Preventive Inspections, Cleaning & Maintenance:**

The formal sewer inspection and cleaning program to be followed should include:

- Schedules for planned inspection routes in every area of the community. Local standards will determine how frequently sewer system lines should be flushed, jetted, or rodded. As a general guideline, it is recommended that inspection and/or maintenance of the public sewer system take place not less than every 4 years.
- Schedules for more frequent inspection of potential problem areas, as identified by the Public Services Director or his/her designee, (e.g. intruding vegetation or tree roots, low spots in sewer lines, excess debris sources, etc.).
- Lift stations should be equipped with power failure and high-water alarms that ring to a staffed location or on-call pager. An alternative power source should be available to maintain power during outages.
- A process for monitoring and gauging rainfall so that lift stations and basins have adequate staffing and monitoring during periods of heavy rainfall.
- Visual monitoring of lines with TV cameras on an as-needed basis.
- Cleaning of sewer lines where evidence of impeded water flow is found;
- Procedures for avoiding an excess surge in downstream lines when removing blockage.
- Repair or replacement of system components that have suffered deterioration.
- A log for documenting when each line and manhole has been inspected and cleaned or repaired

## **Sewer Backup Response Procedures**

### **Office Response to a Citizen Report**

Proper response by City of Alma personnel when an individual home or business owner reports a sewer backup problem can greatly minimize anguish and loss from such incidents. A stressed caller should be treated with consideration and empathy. The call should be accepted or quickly referred.

- If a call comes to the Public Works Department during normal working hours, the person taking the call will take the name, phone number, and address of the person calling as well as time called and will forward that information to a member of the sewer crew/supervisor. **(See Sewer Backup Intake Report)**
- The person(s) responding to the callout is to take the information and contact the person having the backup if needed.
- The response time from the time a call is received by the primary responding party to the time they arrive at the location of the callout will be a maximum of 30 minutes during regular working hours.
- If the primary responding party determines that additional help is needed because of the severity of the problem, he/she shall call an additional employee for assistance and notify the Public Works Superintendent.

## Field Response to a Sewer Backup Report

Timely action taken by field personnel will vary, depending upon the situation. It is vital that the individual who reported the backup be met calmly, and that full respect is shown for the owner's property and possessions.

Upon arriving at the address, the crew will pull lids on the upstream and downstream manholes to determine if the city line is flowing.

- At this time, the sewer crew will flush the city's line if necessary.
- If the resident or property owner requests to have the Public Works crew to come out to their location and the City line is flowing and the sanitary issue within the home is not found to be within the City's line, the property owner will be charged a **\$230** service fee for their time. If the problem is found to be within the City's line, the property owner will not be charged for the City of Alma's time to repair sanitary main's issue.
- The sewer crew will then go to the house or business and let the caller (property owner or resident) know that the City line is flowing without obstruction and that they will have to contact a plumber if they are still experiencing a plug.
- If the sanitary sewer backup was a result of the City's sanitary main not flowing, staff will advise the homeowner/resident they will need to obtain a copy of the **"City of Alma – Notice of Claim" and an "Inventory of Damaged/Destroyed Property"** form. These forms are available on our website or by contacting the Public Services Department.
- Never discuss matters of legal claims or liability for damage. Explain that the City will investigate and make final decisions regarding responsibility based on the facts.
- Answer any questions the homeowner/resident might have. Keep answers brief and to the point.
- Do not indicate to the homeowner/resident that they will be reimbursed for damages. Damage claim questions should be referred to the City Attorney.

In the event of a blockage the call-out crew shall make every attempt to open the line. The call-out crew shall not leave a line that is still plugged without the approval of the Public Services Director or his/her designee.

- If the City line is plugged, the sewer crew will pull lids on the downstream manholes until they find one from which they can flush the city line and will run the flusher hose up the City line until the City line is opened and flowing.
- Staff will advise the homeowner/resident they will need to obtain a copy of the **"City of Alma – Notice of Claim" and an "Inventory of Damaged/Destroyed Property"** form. These forms are available on our website or by contacting the Public Services Department.
- Never discuss matters of legal claims or liability for damage. Explain that the City will investigate and make final decisions regarding responsibility based on the facts.
- Answer any questions the homeowner/resident might have. Keep answers brief and to the point.
- Do not indicate to the homeowner/resident that they will be reimbursed for damages. Damage claim questions should be referred to the City Attorney.
- Staff will inspect the affected area for damage.

- This is not intended to be the basis for paying a claim to the property owner; it allows the City Attorney to verify the accuracy of the claim and the degree of any damage.
- If the homeowner or resident asks for suggestions for repair or cleanup companies, do not make recommendations.
- If it is determined by the Public Services Director or his/her designee that, during the course of sewer maintenance or repair operations, a sewer plug was caused by negligence, the City will immediately facilitate the cleanup and associated costs by contacting the appropriate capable companies.

### **Documenting the Backup**

All documentation must be completed at the time of the backup by using the **Onsite Sewer Backup Assessment**. It is extremely important that addresses, street names, and homeowner/resident names are correct and included in the documentation. This assists in both reviewing the damage claim and evaluating the problem line for preventative and corrective maintenance.

- Within 24 hours, the Public Services Director or his/her designee will discuss with the call-out crew all information about the backup including how it was jetted, from which manhole, if done with the flow, if there are drop pipes in the manhole, or any other pertinent information that follow-up personnel need to know, such as TV follow-up and preventative maintenance (PM) dates. Any of the following, or a combination thereof, may be done for preventative maintenance on the city line that was backed up:
  - Televis city line for possible problems
  - Root saw line if needed after televising
  - Put on schedule for root foaming if line was root sawed
  - Put line on six month or yearly schedule if needed
  - Repair line if needed

### **Sewer Backup Investigations**

An emergency response plan should be developed to assure that applicable personnel are prepared to take timely and efficient action in the case of a sewer backup incident. The plan should include at least the following:

- Designated Public Services response personnel, including names and emergency phone numbers;
- Back up personnel to be contacted should those in primary positions be unreachable
- Specialty contractor information that may be needed for sewer line repair, cleanup or engineering consultation. Contractors' business and emergency home numbers should be on record;
- Names and telephone numbers of any regulatory or environmental agency that should be informed of a sewer backup or wastewater problem in the region;
- A list of all emergency cleanup or pumping equipment, and where it is stored.
- A power failure backup system should be in place, as well as a failure alarm system for all lift stations, or sewer pump stations.
- Alarms should ring to a staffed location, or 24-hour "on call" pager.