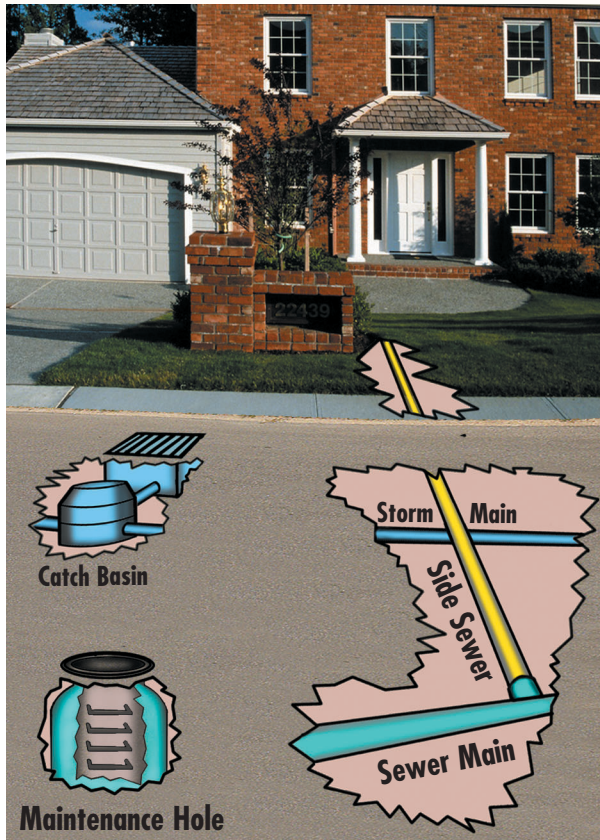


## What is a Side Sewer?

It's important for homeowners and building owners to know about their side sewer because they are responsible for maintaining and repairing that section of pipe. The side sewer is owned by private party and is defined as the section of pipe that carries wastewater from your home or building's plumbing system to the public sewer main (usually under the street).



### Hint!

You can get specialized information (on selected parcels) within the Seattle city limits via a side sewer card, lateral map, and aerial photographs from the Seattle Department of Planning and Development. Call 206-684-5362 for more information.

## Other Helpful Hints

### Common sources of sewer problems

- Tree roots can penetrate older clay pipes. Modern side sewer pipes are heavy duty, water-tight plastic which last much longer.
- Grease can contribute greatly to sewer problems. Prevent grease, fat, oil, wax and other debris from going down the drain by scraping them into the trash. Do not put these kinds of materials into your garbage disposal. It can cause blockages in the sewer system, which can lead to backups.
- The grade (slope) of your private side sewer can also impact how well your sewer lines function. If the slope is too gradual, you may encounter more frequent blockages. To learn about required slope for side sewers, call **206-684-5362**.
- Sometimes, private side sewers are joined with neighboring properties before they connect to the city's sewer main. Any unusual bends, curves or connections can lead to sewer problems. A blockage in one section of a joint or shared side sewer line can cause backups to neighboring properties.
- Under rare circumstances, heavy storm-related events can result in backups in some areas with a combined sewer/drainage system. If you suspect that extreme rainfall is causing a sewer backup, call SPU's 24-hour emergency number at **206-386-1800**.
- To learn more about the City of Seattle's Side Sewer codes, permits, registered contractors and Director's Rules visit [http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/side\\_sewer\\_program/Overview/](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/permits/side_sewer_program/Overview/) or call **206-684-5362**.



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## Troubleshooting Your Sewer Problem



## Helpful Hints from Seattle Public Utilities

Seattle  
 Public  
Utilities

## Sewer Backups

Sewer backups can be very unpleasant and they need to be resolved as quickly as possible to eliminate exposure to potentially harmful bacteria and viruses.

Most frequently, sewer backups are a result of a clogged private side sewer line. You are responsible for maintaining the side sewer that runs from your home to the public sewer main. Read on for more information about resolving sewer problems.

**Hint!** Be sure to stay away from the contaminated area or wear protective boots and rubber gloves, and wash up thoroughly when you are finished.

### When Should I Call The City?

Call Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) immediately if sewage is coming up inside your home when you are not using water. A crew will check the city's sewer and notify you of the results of their investigation as soon as possible. City crews are responsible for maintaining the main sewer lines and the



connection to your side sewers (generally located in the street or city right of way), but not the side sewers themselves. Homeowners are responsible for side sewer maintenance and replacement. For emergencies, SPU maintenance crews are available 24 hours a day at **206-386-1800**.

### When Should I Call a Private Company?

If you notice slow drainage or you suspect a blockage, the problem is likely in your private side sewer line and you should contact a private service company to investigate.

## Which Private Service Should I Call?

Companies offer a full range of services, including unblocking, repairing, and replacing sewer lines or pipe, but some specialize only in certain areas. Make sure to ask which services are provided.

**Rooter services** unplug plumbing and private side sewers using water pressure or mechanical "snakes." Make sure the roofer service's snake cable is long enough to reach from your side sewer to the city's main sewer line (typically located underneath the street or alley). Rooter companies also might repair and/or replace side sewers.

**Side sewer contractors** repair structural problems, such as breaks or holes in side sewers. Some contractors also might replace or unplug sewer lines.

### Hint!

#### Hiring a Private Company

1. Since companies offer a wide range of prices, it's a good idea to get at least three written bids before hiring a company.
2. Ask friends and relatives for recommendations.
3. Check with the Better Business Bureau at 206-431-2222 to find reputable companies.

**Plumbers** repair leaky or broken fixtures and they install systems in new construction and remodeling. If only some of your fixtures are not draining, or if your pipes are leaking, a plumber might be able to remedy the problem.

All repairs performed in the city right-of-way must be done by a contractor licensed and bonded to work in Seattle. Visit <http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/rssc/> for a list of registered side sewer contractors.

## Questions You Should Ask



- **Where is the blockage?** If your line is rootered, have the service provider write down the specific footage where the blockage was found (or where they think it is). Also have the provider mark the spot on the ground. This information is helpful in determining if the problem is within the city's area of responsibility. The mark can be helpful if you must dig up the pipe to repair it.
- **What is causing the problem?** Have the service provider write down the probable cause of the blockage. Knowing the type of blockage will help determine what method should be used to open it, and if regular maintenance of your side sewer is needed to prevent future backups.
- **Should a TV camera be used to see blockages in my line?** TV cameras generally are not effective in determining what is blocking a line. They cannot see under water, so if a line is blocked and not draining, the camera won't be able to see inside your pipes. Camera inspections are most useful after the blockage has been cleared to determine the condition of your pipes and where future problems might turn up.

**Hint!** Make sure you have all questions answered in legible writing at the time of service with the provider's signature and date.