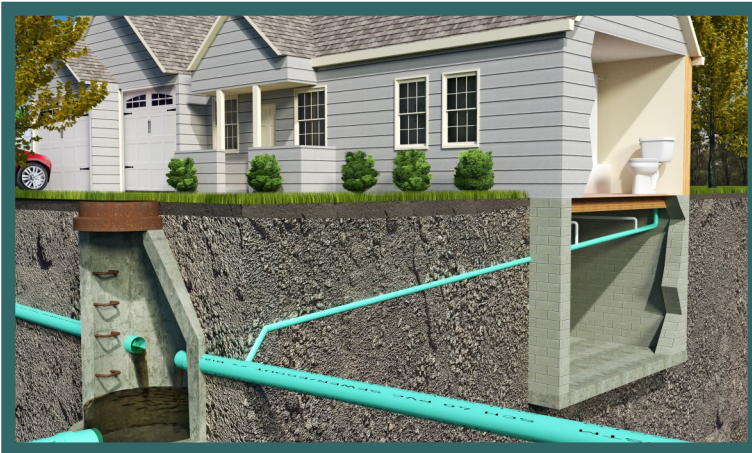




# Sanitary Sewer House Lateral

## *Do you know much about your home's sewer system?*

A sanitary sewer lateral is the pipe that carries sanitary waste from the plumbing system in a home or business to the public sanitary sewer main. The sanitary sewer lateral is located on private property while the public sanitary sewer main is typically located in a public right of way (public streets) or a dedicated county easement located on private property. Sanitary sewer laterals are typically 4" in diameter and public sewer mains are typically 8" and larger in diameter.



### Sanitary Sewer Lateral

- The sewer laterals are integral parts of the sanitary sewer system. They help carry away all waste from your home (bathrooms, kitchens, showers, etc.) to the sanitary sewer main.
- The building lateral is considered part of the home. Maintenance, repair, and replacement of laterals is the responsibility of the property owner and is enforceable under Section 504.1 of the Virginia Property Maintenance Code. Performing regular maintenance and making necessary repairs is vital to ensuring the longevity of your lateral, similar to other home upkeep. Most can be cleaned by accessing the sanitary cleanout. Fairfax County is responsible for maintaining the public sewer in the street or easement.

### Determining if there is a Lateral Problem

- Some signs that laterals may require repair include: Frequently clogged drains, odor of sewage, and basement backups during rain. The best way to assess the condition of a lateral is by Closed Circuit Television Video (CCTV) examination.
- Sanitary sewer basement backups can be caused by a variety of factors. You have probably noticed that basement backups usually occur during heavy rain storms. This is due to the fact that sanitary systems are inundated by an overabundance of rain water. In Fairfax County, the sanitary sewer is separate from the storm sewer, meaning rain water is entering the system through either inflow (direct connection to the sanitary system), or infiltration (water entering the system through an indirect source).



## Sanitary Sewer Cleanout

- A sewer cleanout is a point of access where the sewer lateral can be serviced. It usually is 4" in diameter and has a tight-fitting steel or plastic cap over it. If you are not successful in locating one, you either do not have one or it may be buried under dirt. A plumber can assist you in locating it.

### What will be needed in order to make a repair or replacement?

- If a repair or replacement is to be made on private property, a plumbing permit from the county is required. If a repair or replacement is to be made in the public street (VDOT ROW), a permit from the State will be required as well. A plumber must be certified, licensed and bonded to make any repairs, repairs to be inspected by either Residential or Commercial Inspections.



### What to do if a sanitary sewer leak, backup or problem is reported to DCC

- DCC will open a case and investigate, with the assistance from the Health Department, DPWES – Wastewater Collection Division (WCD), or DPWES – Maintenance Stormwater Management Division (MSMD).
- Investigate the property to notice if there is any dark colored liquid visible on the property or the street, if there is "soggy" ground in the yard of the vicinity of the sanitary lateral, or if sewage odors are emitting from certain area of the property.
- Make contact with the property owner or occupant to inquire if any leaks have been noticed, and ask if he or she can either flush the toilet a few times or run the bath tub for a few minutes. Notice if there are any gurgling sounds or bubbles emitting from the soil, or if there is an increase in odor.

### Basement Backups

#### Infiltration:

- Root intrusion into lateral, cracked or broken laterals/mains, defective manhole, defective lateral connections.

#### Inflow :

- Roof drain connection, uncapped cleanout, storm sewer cross-connection, illegal foundation drain connection.

### Contact Information for Lateral Location or Help?

- Contact either the Wastewater Collection Division, Records Section at 703-250-2700, TTY 711, or the 24-hour Trouble Response Center at 703-323-1211, TTY 711.
- Think of your sewer lateral as you would think of your water heater. They both perform an important function that people use daily in everyday life, but are unseen and often taken for granted. It isn't until these systems are not operating correctly that we consider their importance.
- Contact the Health Department at 703-246-2300 to report the leak and request they visit the site to investigate for potential health risk issues. If it has been determined that a leak is occurring or a backup into the structure is occurring, a Notice of Violation will be issued to the owner under Virginia Property Maintenance Code Section 504.1. All plumbing fixtures shall be properly installed and maintained in working order, and shall be kept free from obstructions, leaks and defects and be capable of performing the function for which such plumbing fixtures are designed. All plumbing fixtures must be maintained in a safe, sanitary and functional condition.

To report a possible violation OR for more information contact:



Fairfax County Department of Code Compliance  
12055 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035  
Phone: 703-324-1300, TTY 711



To request this information in an alternate format, call the Department of Code Compliance.

*This Fairfax County, VA Publication (published January 2024) summarizes a few regulations. See relevant codes for specific requirements.*

