

# Sanitary Sewer Backwater Basics

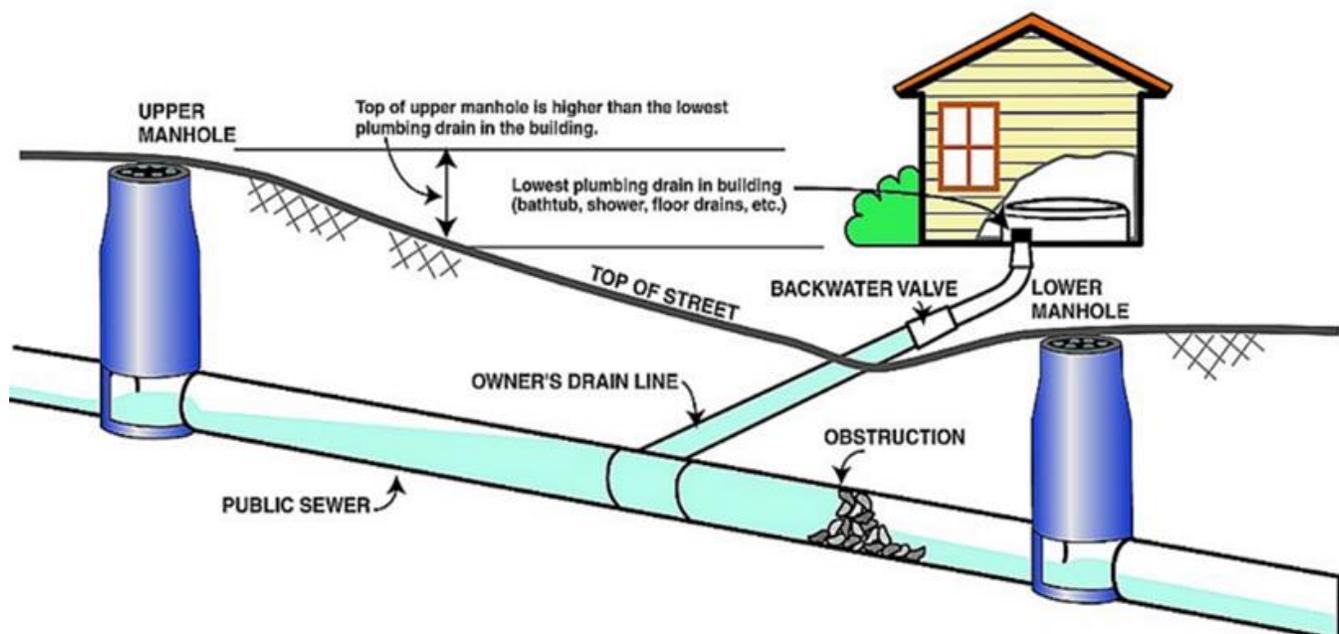
September 2018

As the old adage says, sewage flows downhill, or at least it should! No one wants sewage to back up in their homes. The sewer drain lines in your home can get plugged by grease, hair or something improperly being flushed down the toilet or sink drains. Often you can clear this with a plunger by pushing the items through the clog.

Very often, minor back-ups are caused by tree roots or broken lateral lines that serve homes from the main line and can be fairly easily fixed by a homeowner. Laterals are typically 4" sewer lines that connect the main line to the home and are the homeowner's responsibility. Plumbers (or homeowners) can easily find these blockages by sending a "snake" (not a real snake, but a long skinny metal rod) down through a vent or clean out to find the cause of the problem. These minor back-ups are often found when a homeowner sees dirty water in a bathtub or shower on the main floor or basement of a home. These blockages are fixed by removing and replacing the damaged section of lateral. These fixes on private property do not require a permit and can be completed by a homeowner or plumber.

The more serious and damage causing sewer backflows occur when the City's sewer system surcharges. Most often these types of serious backups are caused or exacerbated by significant rainfall and localized flooding that inadvertently overwhelms the City's system, a significant tree root or other blockage in a main line, or even City crews unclogging a major back up with a jet rodder. If you are in an area that is lower than the first upstream manhole cover, you can prevent this type of backup by installing a sewer back flow valve/device at your home. The City can help you determine vulnerability. Please call public works at 541-488-5587 to schedule a visit.

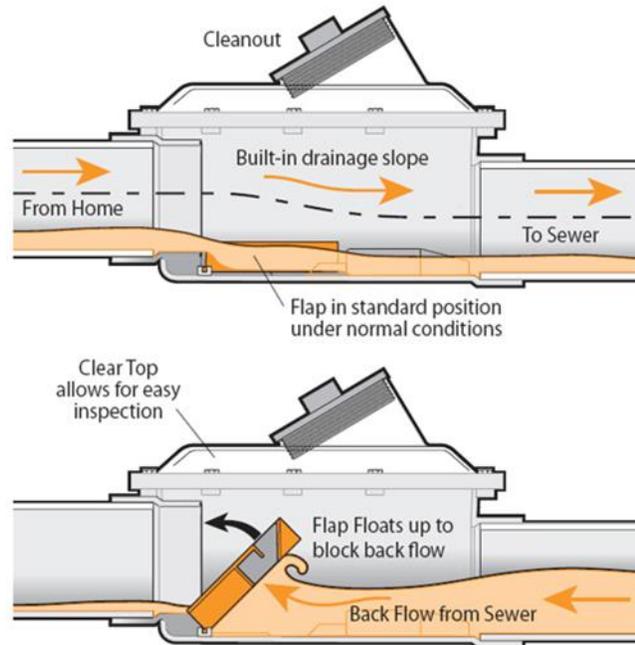
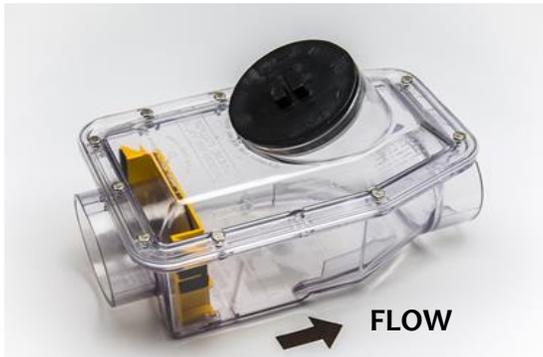
The Oregon Plumbing Specialty Code (2017) requires the installation of an approved backwater valve for fixtures located below the next upstream manhole. This is typically for new construction or remodels.



**710.0 Drainage of Fixtures Located Below the Next Upstream Manhole or Below the Main Sewer Level.**

**710.1 Backflow Protection.** Fixtures installed on a floor level that is lower than the next upstream manhole cover of the public or private sewer shall be protected from backflow of sewage by installing an approved type of backwater valve. Fixtures on such floor level that are not below the next upstream manhole cover shall not be required to be protected by a backwater valve. Fixtures on floor levels above such elevation shall not discharge through the backwater valve. Cleanouts for drains that pass through a backwater valve shall be clearly identified with a permanent label stating “backwater valve downstream”.

There are three typical styles of backflow device options and your plumber can recommend the best one for your situation. The backflow devices will stop outside sewage from entering your home’s plumbing and sewer system.



A permit from the City is required for the installation of backflow prevention devices. The City does not “recommend” plumbers, but any licensed plumber can do this work. There are several plumbers that are licensed in Ashland from the Rogue Valley including:

Dominic Smith Plumbing Repair  
John the Ashland Handyman  
Scott Fitch Company LLC  
Sprague Plumbing  
Sewer Drain Minor Repairs  
Economy Plumbing  
Ashland Medford Plumbing  
Curtius Huntley Plumbing Inc.  
Teck Plumbing  
Brandes Plumbing Inc  
Ipipe Plumbing

Hopkins Service Plumbing  
Latham Plumbing  
SOS Plumbing & Drain Service  
Drainpros Plumbing  
Tanks Plumbing  
Accurate Plumbing  
Summit Plumbing  
Rapid Rooter  
My Plumber  
Mr. Rooter

