



Sanitary Sewer Overflows (“SSOs”) in Bridgeport, Connecticut

U.S. EPA | WATER INFRASTRUCTURE OUTREACH

What is a Sanitary Sewer Overflow?

An SSO is a release of untreated sewage from municipal sewers, also known as a “sewage spill”. SSOs can contain bacteria and viruses that harm human health, damage property, and degrade the environment.

What are examples of SSOs?

- Sewage backups into basements
- Overflowing sanitary sewer manholes in streets
- Sanitary sewer pipes leaking into waterbodies

What can cause an SSO?

- An old sewer pipe breaks or collapses
- Trash, wipes, face masks, gloves, or grease block a pipe
- Tree roots grow into a pipe, breaking and blocking it
- Water from storms or flooding seep into a pipe until it overflows
- A pump station loses power or breaks down

How do SSOs relate to flooding?

- Floods can cause or worsen SSOs. • SSOs can contaminate floodwater.

How do SSOs differ from Combined Sewer Overflows (“CSOs”)?

- Combined sewers collect wastewater AND stormwater. Sanitary sewers only collect wastewater.
- Under the Clean Water Act, CSOs may be permitted only at specific marked locations during wet weather. SSOs are never permitted.

What can residents do to prevent SSOs?

- NEVER flush wipes, tampons, trash, or oil down a toilet. Even if the wipe says flushable – it is not.
- ONLY flush the 3 Ps of Paper, Pee and Poo down the toilet.
- AVOID floodwaters since they can contain sewage and other harmful substances.
- CHECK whether your homeowner’s or renter’s insurance covers sewage back-ups.



What can homeowners and landlords do to prevent SSOs?

- Consider having a licensed plumber inspect and clean your lateral (pipe that connects a building to the city's sewer).
- Disconnect roof downspouts, sump pumps, and foundation drains from sanitary sewers.
- Eliminate any water fixtures such as sinks, toilets, drains, and showers below the elevation of the street.
- Review information about flood insurance available on websites like www.FloodSmart.gov.
- Help control grease (for example, restaurants should use and maintain grease traps).
- Consider having a licensed plumber install a backwater valve.

Steps to Take During a Basement Backup or Sanitary Sewer Overflow

1. Avoid contact with the contaminated area. Keep family members and pets away.
2. Be alert for hazards such as broken gas lines, flooded electrical units, and submerged furnaces.
3. Contact the City at www.BridgeportCT.gov/Bridgeport311. In a sewer emergency, call WPCA's hotline at: 203-576-7171. If you experience an emergency such as a medical injury or fire, dial 911.
4. City officials will evaluate whether the municipal sewer caused the backup.
NOTE: The property owner is responsible for backups caused by a defective lateral or plumbing system.
5. Hire a qualified professional for cleanup. Everything that was contaminated MUST be disinfected or discarded.
6. Ventilate the space using an open window, fan, or dehumidifier to remove odors.
7. Document the backup for damage and insurance claims. This includes taking pictures of the affected area, listing items that were damaged, and keeping receipts from cleanup services.
8. Contact your insurance provider.
9. If the backup was caused by a plumbing problem on the property, contact a plumber.
If you believe the backup was caused by a problem in the city's sewers, contact the City about filing a claim.

EXAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had a sewage backup in your home? For example, an overflowing toilet, drain, or pipe? Describe what happened and where it happened.
2. How often has this happened to you? Does it usually happen under certain conditions, like during big storms or at a certain time of year?
3. What caused the backup? For example, was it a plumbing problem, or a problem in the city's sewers?
4. Was the backup reported to someone? What was the response? Was it fixed?

Where can I get more information?

Bridgeport Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA): www.BridgeportCT.gov/WPCA

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP):
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Municipal-Wastewater/CT-Sewage-Right-to-Know>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 1: www.epa.gov/Region1/SSO

Disclaimer: This Q&A sheet is provided for informational purposes only and may not constitute EPA views or policies. EPA is not responsible for the content of non-EPA websites, and any mention of services, products or enterprises does not imply EPA endorsement.