

POLICY	
Policy Number: PW2020-001	Date Approved: July 2020
Department: Public Works	Date Reviewed: September 2020
Sanitary Sewer Blockage	

1. **Policy Statement**

The primary responsibility to resolve a sanitary sewer lateral blockage rests with the property owner. If a blockage occurs, the property owner should hire a certified plumber to clear the blockage. If there is uncertainty as to where the blockage is, Town staff will attend the site to investigate and assist with clearing the blockage. This will support the determination of where and why the blockage occurred and whether the property owner or the Town is responsible for the costs to clear the blockage. If the blockage is on the property owner's property, the costs will be the responsibility of the property owner. If the blockage is determined to be on the Town's property and the property owner has not contributed to the cause of the blockage by putting items and/or substances into the sewer that are prohibited, the Town will be responsible for the costs to clear the blockage.

No person shall discharge and/or place prohibited substances into the sanitary sewer system.

2. **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to interpret and communicate the responsibilities for the Town of Kirkland Lake, plumbing contractors and property owners in regards to Sewer Lateral Blockage Clearing and the obligation to call Town of Kirkland Lake staff to deal with sanitary sewer lateral blockages when necessary.

3. **Scope**

This policy applies to the owner and/or tenant of any property connected to the Town of Kirkland Lake Sanitary Sewer System and all private plumbers engaged to remove blockages within the sanitary sewer system. The owner is responsible for the clearing of any blockage anywhere on their property within the sanitary sewer lateral connection and all costs related to the inspection, clearing and associated activities.

4. Definitions

Joint Connection (“Y”) – shall be a sewer lateral connection on the Town’s right-of-way which accepts storm or sanitary flows from more than one private property.

Owner – means the legal Owner of the private property where a sewer blockage occurs.

Private Property – shall mean all property outside the legal limits of the Town’s right-of-way except Town owned land.

Prohibited Substances - shall mean any liquid or solid not permitted in the definition of black water, which means, waste water from toilets and/or grey water, which means, relatively clean waste water from baths, sinks, washing machines, and other kitchen appliances.

Sanitary Sewer Lateral – a sanitary sewer lateral is a section of the sewer that connects the property owners building to the Municipality’s main sewer. This permits the discharge of all wastewater from private property.

Sewer Lateral Inspection – a sewer lateral inspection may include the use of closed circuit TV (CCTV) to determine the condition and location of blockage or defect.

Town – means the Corporation of the Town of Kirkland Lake.

Town Right-of-Way – shall mean the entire street allowance dedicated as public highway, including the traveled portion of the roadway, sidewalk and boulevard area, extending from property line to property line.

5. Policy & Procedures

Trouble Shooting for Blockage and Collapse

The first indicator of a blockage or collapse will result in sewage coming up through a basement floor drain.

Sewer Blockage

The Town’s policy regarding sanitary sewer lateral blockages states the property owner is responsible for the lateral from the building to the Town’s main sewer with limited exceptions, such as;

- a. When it can be proven that there are tree roots from a municipal tree causing the blockage,

- b. Sewer pipe is broken/collapsed on the Town's right-of-way, or
- c. If there is a joint connection at the property line.

The property owner is responsible for retaining a certified plumber to determine the extent of the blockage. The Public Works Department must be notified if there is a discrepancy so that staff can confirm that the collection main is operating properly. Environmentally sensitive materials should not be poured down the drain, on the ground or into the sewer.

The Town will only assume limited responsibility for reimbursement under the following conditions.

- a. The record of camera inspection confirms the blockage is a result of the Town's blocked sewage infrastructure (i.e. broken and/or collapsed pipe) within the sanitary sewer lateral on the Town's right-of-way.
- b. The blockage is not a result of accumulated household kitchen grease, food waste or solids not permitted in the drain, or
- c. Tree roots that have infiltrated into the sanitary sewer lateral from private and/or neighbouring properties.

It should be clear that just because a blockage is created on Municipal property, it does not necessarily mean that the Town will pay the cost to resolve the problem.

There are several circumstances that cause a sewage blockage/backup including, but not limited to the following:

- a. Residents pouring household kitchen grease down the drains, which gradually builds up until it blocks the pipe. Only toilet paper should be flushed into the sanitary sewer system,
- b. Blockage within the sanitary sewer lateral due to age, deterioration, roots, settlement or objects too large have been inserted into the drain,
- c. Blockage in the collection main or manhole that requires cleaning by Town personnel, and/or
- d. Surcharging in the collection main due to abnormally high flows and/or heavy rainfall.

The property owner is responsible for the removal of blockages within the entire length of the sanitary sewer lateral, unless there is a joint connection at the property line. The rodding service is available from local qualified plumbing contractors. A proper clean out must be available to insert the cleaning rods and/or a toilet has to be removed by the plumber.

If the Town representative determines that the backup was caused by a problem with the sanitary sewer lateral pipe between the property line and sewer main due to pipe defect (i.e. broken/collapsed pipe), the rodding fee may be reimbursed.

The Town will query the owner if previous sewer blockage had been experienced and review the Town's records for details and the nature of any previous blockage.

It is sometimes necessary for Public Works to carry out a closed circuit camera inspection of the service line to determine the nature of the blockage, particularly if there is a prior history of sewer backups.

If the problem is found to be a pipe defect on the private side of the property line, the owner shall be responsible for the repair. If the problem is on the Town side due to roots, collapse or frozen, Public Works will carry out the repairs at the Town's cost.

In circumstances where infrastructure has not been installed in accordance with design standards, such as shallow installation conditions due to bedrock that promote the freezing of pipes, the Director of Public Works shall account for these circumstances when opportuning costs. For clarity, in a circumstance where the blockage has been caused by ground conditions and the property owner has not contributed to the sewer blockage in any way, the Town of Kirkland Lake shall be responsible for the costs to remove the frozen blockage in accordance with all other provisions of this policy.

Should Public Works receive an after-hours call with regards to a blockage in a sanitary sewer lateral, the following procedure shall be followed:

- a. The Supervisor during regular business hours or the on-call employee after hours shall contact the property owner and explain that they must hire a certified plumber to clear the blockage and explain that after the blockage is cleared a video inspection of the sanitary sewer lateral can be arranged with the Public Works Department to help determine the cause, if there is an outstanding issue.
- b. If the camera inspection shows that the problem originated from the Town's sewer main line, the property owner shall be advised that they may submit the plumber's invoice to the Town for reimbursement.
- c. Should the blockage require immediate excavation for clearing, the Supervisor or their designate shall be responsible to call in the required staff and equipment to ensure the necessary work is carried out in a timely manner.
- d. Any work performed by the Town (i.e. blockage removal and/or camera inspection) may be at the owner's expense.

6. Summary

Owner's responsibility

- a. Use the sewer lateral connection in a responsible manner to maximize its life and efficiency.
- b. Clearing and/or inspection of sewer of blocked sewer lateral regardless of location. Where a private sewer lateral connection is repeatedly found to be blocked, the owner shall forthwith undertake such corrective measures as are required.
- c. Refrain from discarding any household kitchen grease, food waste or other solid material into the sanitary sewer lateral.

Town's responsibility

The Town will assume the maintenance responsibility of the sanitary sewer lateral within the Town's right-of-way. The Town will coordinate all activities and will assume all costs associated with the following activities:

- a. The removal of tree roots from the sanitary sewer lateral on the Town's right-of-way.
- b. The replacement of the sanitary sewer lateral on the Town's right-of-way as part of any Town road reconstruction and/or sewer main line replacement program if, to the satisfaction of the Town, such replacement is technically practical and fiscally responsible.
- c. The Town shall not be required to cleanup any sewage or water backup in the basement or other areas of the owner's property.

The owner acknowledges and recognizes that the Town has no prior knowledge of when a sanitary sewer lateral connection will have a blockage and a sewer backup could occur.

The owner also recognizes that the Town will use its best efforts to restore the sanitary sewer lateral connection to a temporary useable standard as soon as possible, however, if a repair requiring excavation is required, the Town will require a maximum of 5 working days to obtain "emergency" utility locates. After the Town has obtained the utility locates, the repair will be completed expeditiously.

The Public Works Department shall be responsible for the administration and the implementation of this policy.

If there is a dispute between the property owner and the Public Works Department as to the location of the blockage, and it cannot be resolved at the staff level, the Director of Public Works shall resolve the dispute and the decision shall be deemed to be final.

The property owner's home insurance may cover sewer backups. The Town is not responsible for sewer backups unless the Town has been negligent. If the owner believes that is the case, the owner or their insurance company can make a claim.

Please refer to the sanitary sewer system drawing below for illustration purposes only.

