

# Sewage Overflow Basics and the

## Role of the Homeowner



### Sewage 101

Everyday, we flush the toilet drain dirty bath water or perhaps pour old cooking oil down the sink drain without thinking about where it goes next.

The wastewater or sewage we generate in our homes travels through a pipe, called a house lateral, that connects your home to the public sewage system.

During dry weather, the sewage is adequately transported to the treatment plant. However, during rainy weather, much of the sewage overflows into our streams and rivers *before* it reaches the treatment plant. These overflows contaminate our local waterways where families swim, boat and fish.

### What causes the sewage to overflow?

During wet weather (rain or snow melt), too much stormwater gets into the separate sanitary sewer system, which is the set of pipes designed to carry only wastewater.

The pipes are not able to handle the extra volume of stormwater during rainy weather so raw sewage overflows into our waterways before reaching the treatment plant. Most newer communities have these separate sanitary sewer systems; the stormwater is carried in a separate system and is discharged directly into our rivers and streams. However, some older communities have combined sewer systems, which carry both waste and stormwater in the same set of pipes. Our municipality has installed new water and sewer systems.

### How does the stormwater get into a sanitary sewer system?

A significant part of the overflow problem is linked to improperly connected roof and driveway drains and deteriorating house laterals, which allow stormwater to get into a separate sanitary sewer system. This inflow can result in overloading and overflows.

Many communities now test for improper or poor connections with a dye that traces the path of stormwater from your home's drains and rain spouts. Homeowners are responsible for removing improper connections and repairing deteriorated laterals. New technologies can make parts of the repair possible without digging up a homeowner's property.

Stormwater can also enter the sanitary system through cracked or broken pipes. This is called infiltration.

### Why is the sewage overflow issue important?

These overflows not only violate the federal Clean Water Act, but they cause a host of other problems for communities and the region as a whole.

- Raw sewage in our waterways causes a public health risk.
- Water quality may be unacceptable for boating, swimming or fishing for many days after it stops raining.

- Children can be exposed to raw sewage from overflowing manholes in the street or by playing in streams and creeks.
- Overflow can kill fish and other aquatic life.
- It impedes economic development because communities can be restricted from tapping into sewers to build new houses or businesses until the problem is corrected.

### What is being done about the problem?

Municipal officials with the NYCDEP & NYSDEC have been meeting to work on cooperative strategies to solve the problem.

The Village has searched for an effective, long-term solution to the sewage overflow crisis. The acquisition of NYC and federal grant money has allowed the Village to explore the latest technologies to help solve the problem.

Beginning in 2001, the Village began active stormwater remediation around Wells Brook, began the construction of a potable water collection and wastewater distribution system (nearly complete), built a new state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant, and is currently performing house sewer connections throughout the Village.

### What is my role as a homeowner?

Your community has a separate sanitary system, ask the municipality how you can have your stormwater drains tested to ensure they are not improperly connected to the sewer system. If your storm drains are connected to the sewer system, you may want to consult a professional to correct the problem.

Consider installing a rain barrel in your yard or garden. During wet weather, the barrel collects stormwater through your home's downspout. During dry weather, a hose connected to the barrel allows water to seep out to water your yard or garden. This helps to control stormwater, which contributes to sewage overflows polluting our waterways.

In addition, homeowners can support their municipality's efforts to repair or replace the public sewage system in order to comply with the EPA order. Fixing the problem requires a substantial financial investment and while municipalities are seeking the most cost effective methods for a solution, homeowners can expect higher sewage rates over the coming years. It will take the cooperation and support of many individuals and communities to ensure a solution that will protect our region's water resources.

For more information Contact the Village of Brewster at 845-279-3760 about the sewer system in your community or visit our web site at [brewstervillage.ny-gov](http://brewstervillage.ny-gov).