

Private Sewer Lateral Program

Water Quality Department



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What is the Laguna Beach Private Sewer Lateral Program?

The Laguna Beach City Council approved a Private Sewer Lateral Program in May of 2004. For over a year, the City worked with the community and plumbers to develop the program to address problems caused by roots from private sewer laterals. The program covers the City's sewer service area to Nyes Place. Property owners south of Nyes place should contact the South Coast Water District (SCWD) at (949) 499-4555 or visit their website at www.scwd.org to learn about the SCWD private sewer lateral program.

The City has found that roots entering the City pipes from private laterals are causing blockages and sewer spills. The program is needed to address regulatory agency concerns regarding sewage spills and because a spill can create health hazards and pollute waterways and the ocean. The program is essentially an "awareness" program. Owners will have the option of maintaining their laterals in a functional condition through routine cleaning or by repairing or replacing their pipes. Property owners will be sent a notice and made aware of deficiencies in their sewer laterals if observed during maintenance of the public sewer main lines. A video inspection is also required as part of a major home or business remodeling project, and every five years for commonly owned properties, such as condominiums and apartments. The City will maintain a list of "Participating Plumbing Companies" that property owners may call to have their lateral video inspected and the condition of their sewer lateral line evaluated. The list is available on the program website menu. However, a property owner may choose to use any licensed plumbing company they like.

The proper maintenance of a private sewer lateral is important because your line can clog with roots and grease and can cause a backup inside your property or a spill from the line. A sewage spill can cause damage to your property that is expensive to fix. In addition, a spill may cause public and/or environmental health concerns.

Preventative Measures you can take to practice good "Lateral Hygiene"

- *Periodically have your sewer lateral video inspected and cleaned.*
- *Repair or replace deteriorated or damaged lateral pipes as soon as possible.*
- *Do not plant trees or large scrubs above sewer lateral lines.*
- *Never pour grease down a drain. Let it cool down and dispose of in the trash.*

- *Scrape food off your dishes into the trash before rinsing off into the sink.*

Problems to Look for:

- *Drain back ups inside your house or business.*
- *Wet or soggy ground in your yard.*
- *Water leaking from cleanouts or outside drains.*
- *Unusual odors or sewage smells in or around your home or business.*

For more information about the City's program please call the Water Quality Department at (949) 497-0781.

Frequently Asked Questions Laguna Beach Private Sewer Lateral Program

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The following are answers to some frequently asked questions regarding the City's Private Sewer Lateral Program:

- **WHY DOES THE CITY NEED A PRIVATE SEWER LATERAL PROGRAM?**

The program is needed to reduce sewage spills in the City to better protect public health and the environment. The primary cause of sewage spills in Laguna Beach is roots from private sewer laterals that block public sewer lines. The City worked with regulatory agencies and the community to develop the program.

- **WHAT IS A PRIVATE SEWER LATERAL?**

A private sewer lateral is the pipe that drains your sinks, bathtubs, toilets and showers from your home or building to City's sewer main line.

- **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REPAIRING AND MAINTAINING PRIVATE SEWER LATERALS?**

Property owners are responsible for the operation, maintenance and repair of their property's sewer lateral from the home or building and including the point of connection with the City's sewer main line.

- **WHY IS MAINTAINING A PRIVATE SEWER LATERAL IMPORTANT?**

Proper maintenance of a private sewer lateral is important because they can clog with roots and grease and can cause a backup inside your property or spill from the line. A sewage spill can cause damage to your property that is expensive to fix. In addition, a spill may cause public and/or environmental health concerns.

- **WHAT IS THE CITY DOING TO HELP?**

The City is aggressively evaluating and repairing the public sewer system. The program includes video inspecting the sewer pipes, evaluating the condition of the sewer lines and pumping systems, rehabilitation or replacement of sewer lines and point repairs to damaged lines. In addition, the City has stepped up sewer line maintenance. Restaurants are also assisting by minimizing the amount of grease discharged into the sewer system.

- **WHEN DO PROPERTY OWNERS NEED TO CHECK A PRIVATE LATERAL?**

There are three parts to the City's program. In all three cases there is a 180-day grace period from the inspection date to initiate a maintenance program or complete any necessary repairs.

1. An Awareness Program – Property owners will receive notices when the City becomes aware of potential problems with their private lateral. These problems are commonly identified when the City is videoing public sewer lines and roots, cracks, or separations in private sewer lateral pipes are visible from inside the public pipe.
2. Major Building Remodels – when a significant remodel project is completed the lateral will need to be video inspected.
3. Common Interest and Multi-Unit Developments - Development such as condominium projects, community apartment projects, stock cooperatives, and planned developments will need to video inspect their private sewer lateral system every five-years.

* Even if you do not fall within these three cases, it is recommended that your sewer lateral be video inspected on a periodic basis to ensure it is functioning properly.

- **WHAT STEPS SHOULD PROPERTY OWNERS TAKE TO CHECK A LATERAL?**

Contact a plumbing company participating in the City's program for a video inspection and lateral assessment. A "Participating Plumbing Company" listing is available on the Private Sewer Lateral Program website. You are not required to use a company from the list and may choose to use any plumbing company you like.

Be sure to request a copy of the video inspection.

- **WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GET PRIVATE LATERAL WORK COMPLETED?**

1. Obtain more than one written cost estimate.
2. Use a licensed plumber and/or contractor and ask for references.
3. Make sure the written cost estimate includes a detailed description of the proposed work and time frame to get the work completed.
4. Make sure the proposed work in the estimate meets all applicable City, building Code, California Plumbing Code, and Section 500 "Greenbook" standards.
5. Review the inspection video with the plumber and request a copy.
6. Be satisfied with the results. Make sure the work was completed as agreed to.

- **DOES A PRIVATE LATERAL HAVE TO BE REPAIRED OR REPLACED?**

No, if a program of periodic cleanings will keep a private lateral functioning properly. However, it is recommended that deteriorated laterals be cleaned, repaired or replaced as soon as possible to prevent sewage leaks and spills onto public property or into your own home or business.

- **IS A CITY PERMIT REQUIRED?**

Only for private lateral repair or replacement work in the public right-of-way. A public works permit must be obtained from the City's Building department. The City must inspect the work for approval.

- **DO SEWER FEES COVER THE COST OF REPAIRS TO MY LATERAL?**

The sewer service fees you pay are for the operation and maintenance of the public sewer system and treatment of sewage. No funds are available for improvements to private sewer systems.

- **CAN PROPERTY OWNERS BE FINED FOR NOT MAINTAINING A FUNCTIONAL SEWER LATERAL?**

If a private property owner does not make good faith efforts to maintain a functional sewer lateral, i.e. routine cleaning or repairs, and a sewage spill occurs; fines can be levied.

- **WHOM CAN PROPERTY OWNERS CALL FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Please call the Water Quality Department at (949) 497-0378.

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Common Problems with Wastewater Laterals

Roots

The picture shows root masses coming out of two private sewer lateral lines into the City main sewage line. The roots can break off or be pushed into the City main line, which may block the line and cause a sewage spill.



Cracked and Damaged Pipes

This picture shows a pipe that cracked and damaged. The pipe needs to be repaired or replaced depending on the condition of the rest of the pipe. A pipe in this condition may leak and can also allow roots to grow into the pipe and block the line.



Damaged Pipe and Joint Separation

This picture shows a pipe that has failed in the foreground. It also shows in the background that two pipe segments have separated at the joint. The pipe needs to be repaired or replaced depending on the condition of the rest of the pipe. A pipe in this condition may leak and can also allow roots to grow into the pipe and block the line.



"Only Rain in the Storm Drain"