

PREVENTING SANITARY SEWER OVERFLOWS



A sanitary sewer overflow (SSO) is any overflow, spill, release, discharge or diversion of untreated or partially treated wastewater from a sanitary sewer system. A sanitary sewer overflow can spill domestic wastewater out of manholes and onto streets and into stormwater systems, surface water bodies or into toilets, sinks and drains before it can reach a treatment facility.

Causes of Sanitary Sewer Overflows

Although wastewater facilities are permitted and designed to safely and properly collect and manage a specified wastewater capacity, obstructions or extreme conditions can cause SSOs.

When the flow of wastewater is obstructed in the pipe, the wastewater may then back up and overflow through a manhole, cleanout, toilet, sink or drain. This overflowing wastewater may then make its way into the environment, a house or a business.

Contributing factors may include:

- » The build-up of solids and fats, oils and greases in the wastewater collection system which can impede flow.
- » Excess rainfall flowing through the ground into sewers, which are not intended to hold rainfall.
- » Blocked, broken or cracked pipes and other equipment, or power failures that keep the system from properly functioning.
- » Tree roots growing into the sewer causing an obstruction, or shifting or breaking pipes.

Preventing Sewage Spills

Even though sanitary sewer systems are intended to collect and contain all the sewage that flows into them, heavy rains can cause system overflow. Frequent sewage overflows could indicate that the system needs repairs, upgrades or expanded capacity. Expanding capacity, upgrading facilities and repairing or replacing aging or broken sewage infrastructure can help prevent sewage overflows. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, provides low-interest loans to local governments to plan, design and build, or upgrade and expand wastewater and stormwater facilities.

What You Can Do at Home

- » Collect oil and grease in a container and dispose of it in the trash, not down the drain.
- » Scrape grease and food scraps from dishes into the trash can.
- » Use sink and shower drain strainers.
- » Minimize use of kitchen sink garbage disposal units when it is raining. The units require lots of water to operate properly, and they add to the volume of solids in a septic tank or sewage system. To avoid maintenance problems and overflows, compost food scraps or throw them in the trash.
- » To minimize water entering the sewer system, avoid doing laundry or using the dishwasher during heavy rain storms.
- » Route rain gutter downspouts onto your lawn or into the stormwater system.
- » Make sure your home's sewer cleanout cap is intact.
- » Avoid planting trees and shrubs close to sewer lines as tree roots can intrude into a sewer line and cause cracks and clogs.
- » If you experience flooding, never remove sewer manhole covers or your home's sewer cleanout cap to drain the flood water into the sewer system.
- » Do not use the toilet as a trash can.

Do not flush or pour down the drain:

Medications	Herbicides	Cooking oil
Vitamins	Grease	Dental floss
Pesticides	Diapers	Cotton swabs or wipes
Personal care items	Feminine products	