

# Frequently Asked Sewer Questions

## How is the sewer bill calculated? What is my sewer service bill based on?

Sewer bills are based on water consumption. The sewer utility office receives reads from your water company every month.

## Why is my bill so high?

If your bill is higher than you expected or higher than usual, consider some of the following possible causes.

- Have you been watering your lawn or outdoor plants more than usual?
- Do you have a pool that you recently filled?
- Have more people moved into your household or have you had guests? Adding people to a household can cause water usage to go up.
- Do you have a water leak?
  - Check all of your faucets (indoor and outdoor).
  - Check between the meter and house.
  - Check all of your toilets.
    - Running toilets are the most common cause of high sewer bills, even though they are not always the easiest to find. The best way to check for a leak in the toilet is to add a couple of drops of food coloring to the water in the back tank of the stool. Wait 15- 20 minutes without flushing the toilet, check the water in the bowl of the toilet. If the water in the bowl has changed color, then there is evidence that your toilet needs repair. This also may require testing several times to discover the leak.

## Why is my bill so much higher than my neighbor's?

Neighbors like to compare sewer bills. However, this comparison does not accurately reflect what may be occurring in your household. Water usage habits vary greatly from the number of people in your household to how often hands are washed to how long you shower. Other factors could include what type of toilet(s) you have, the size of your washing machine or if you bathe rather than shower. Here are a few water usage facts: • It takes approximately 20 gallons of water to wash dishes by hand • Taking a bath uses approximately 36 gallons of water • Taking a shower uses anywhere from 25 – 50 gallons of water • 5 to 7 gallons are used each time the toilet is flushed (lower depending on the model) Because of the different variables that could contribute to the amount of water used. (google.com)

## Do you adjust for leaks?

Yes, we adjust for leaks that add to your usage, but do not flow through the sewer system. To receive this type of adjustment, the customer must send in a completed leak adjustment form and documentation to prove the leak has been repaired (example: a copy of a plumber's repair bill). Any leak that passes through or flows into the sewer system (example: a toilet leak) will not be adjusted.

## I did not receive my sewer bill. Am I responsible for any penalty?

Yes. Failure to receive a bill does not relieve you of the obligation to pay the sewer service bill on time.

## Why do I have to fix the pipes and/or leaks in my yard? Isn't that the utilities' responsibility?

The utility is responsible for the main line. The customer is responsible from the main line to the residence and all problems that stem from there.

### Why do you charge me for sewer when I water my lawn?

The sewer bill is based on water consumption that has flowed through the meter. There is no way we can distinguish between water that has been used for domestic use and water that has been used for watering the customer's lawn.

### Is it okay to dump grease down my house drains?

No, dumping grease down your house drains will cause grease buildup in your drain lines. Some people believe that if you mix hot water with the grease, it will not clog your lines. While this practice may not clog the lines in your immediate house, by the time the grease gets to your lateral it will have cooled enough to build up in your lateral. Keep in mind, you are responsible for the maintenance of your lateral and calling out a plumber for this type of maintenance can be very expensive.

### Is it okay to flush plastic items down the toilet?

No, flushing plastic items and other non-biodegradable material, such as many brands of baby-wipes, down the toilet causes problems in sewer lines. The material will hang up in your line and cause blockages. If the material reaches the treatment plant it will cause problems at the treatment facilities also.

### What is the difference between a storm drain and a sanitary sewer system?

**Storm drain** A storm drain systems consists of natural and man-made channels and underground pipes (called storm drains) that transport stormwater and snowmelt from streets, yards and other areas and discharges directly into our lakes, rivers, creeks and stormwater holding ponds. This stormwater is **not** treated, and it picks up and carries pollutants along with the stormwater, before discharging into the storm drain system.

**Sanitary system** A sanitary system collects wastewater from toilets, sinks, and showers.

### Why do I smell sewer in my house? What Causes Sewer Odors in The House?

If you detect the smell of sewage, more than likely it is coming from your sewer line. However, since that runs both inside and outside your home, it will take some investigation to pinpoint exactly where it's coming from. Some common culprits for sewer odors are sink and shower drains. However, more often than not the source is often found in the basement, near a sewer drain or utility room drain. That's because the gas responsible for sewer odors, hydrogen sulfide, is quite dense and has difficulty traveling upwards to your main living area.

In most cases of sewer smell, the culprit is an untrapped drain. Drains in the basement or in utility floors rely on a barrier of clean water and air in a U-shaped section of pipe to separate your home from the stench of your city's sewer system. If the pipe is untrapped, sewer odors can escape and seep into your home.

Air vents are responsible for diffusing toxic gases away from your home. If your air vents are blocked, like with dirt, debris, or other items, they may not be able to vent your home properly. This can cause sewer gas to build up in the pipes and leak into the home.

All sewer system trains have a P-shaped trap that fills with water and seals to keep out sewer gas. However, if the drain isn't used frequently, this water will evaporate over time. This can cause the seal to break, which releases the odors.

### Do you offer insurance on sewer lines?

No, the Town of Newburgh does not offer insurance for sewer lines.

### What is this manhole for in my back yard?

The manhole is used for access to the system for maintenance.