

City of Payette

Wastewater Treatment Plant

Sewer Cleaning and “Blow Backs”

The City of Payette must clean its sewer system regularly to ensure it functions properly to protect public health and the environment. This work is performed by qualified, licensed operators employed by the city. Cleaning sewers is performed with a high pressure water stream through a hose using various nozzles appropriate for the type of sewer pipe cleaning (roots, grease, etc.). The debris washed from the pipe is collected at the next manhole through a suction hose. The equipment used is called a Vactor (vac) truck and you may have seen them before or within your community.

During the cleaning process, sewer lines can develop air pressure or a partial vacuum from the cleaning process. Usually any excess air pressure or vacuum will dissipate through the plumbing vents, but occasionally there are facilities with inadequate plumbing vents (i.e. no vents, undersized vents or obstructed vents). In the case of inadequate venting, air pressure could escape through the toilet, floor, sink, tub or shower drains, causing water to splash out or a vacuum could draw the water out of the fixture traps causing an unpleasant odor. This is called a “blow back.”

Odor in your home

Probably the most common problem we encounter, the jetting process can create a vacuum environment in the sewer lines and actually empty the traps under your sinks, toilets, tubs, etc. The result will be the temporary loss of odor control in your home. The remedy for this situation is simply run water in sinks and tubs to restore traps.

The actual cleaning process from manhole to manhole does not take too long although you may see equipment in the area for longer periods due to equipment set up and tear down. The cleaning that could affect your home should not be longer than a couple of hours.

Typically, recovery from a “blow back” event is simply a matter of removing any debris and the cleaning of toilets, sinks, baths, showers, that may have been impacted. You may then continue normal use.

Do I need to worry about my health?

Sewage “blow back” events that involve *only* the discharge of water to walls or surfaces do not result in an immediate health risk. However, it is important that any sewage contaminated water, any resulting debris and surfaces that have come in contact with this water be promptly and thoroughly cleaned. This will require the removal of any debris, the cleaning of surfaces with a soap solution and the disinfection of hard surfaces with a diluted household bleach/water solution. Regular household cleaning products are all that is needed. Rubber gloves are recommended. Never mix ammonia and chlorine products such as household bleach.

What can I do to minimize the need for frequent sewer cleaning?

Keep grease out of the sewers. Do not put cooking grease or oil down the sink or into the toilet. Scrape the grease and oil, once cooled, into the trash. Also, do not put rags, diapers, wet wipes, trash, feminine products or contraceptives into the toilet. These should also be placed in the trash. All of these items cause blockages in the sewers that can result in backups into homes or sanitary sewer overflows to the ground or waters, which is bad for public health and the environment.