

# 7 Broken Sewer and Drain Lines



1900 SW 4th Avenue  
 Portland, Oregon 97201  
 503-823-7300  
 bds@portlandoregon.gov  
 www.Portland.gov/BDS

Your home’s sewer and drain lines have probably been in place since the house was built. When one of these lines breaks, the leaking sewage (whether visible or hidden beneath your yard) harbors disease, may contain hazardous chemicals, and provides access to vermin (including rats). If you have a leak in your sewer line, you need to have it repaired.

## City bureaus that may be involved in your sewer and drain lines repair project

- Bureau of Development Services (BDS): Issues permits for and inspects repairs between the house and the property line.
- Bureau of Environmental Services (BES): Assists in finding the location of the sewer line from the public right-of-way to private property, authorizes all sewer connection work and party sewer repairs and answers questions about shared sewer line issues.
- Bureau of Maintenance (BOM): Performs dye tests and is involved in sewer repairs needed from the curb into the street.
- Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT): Issues permits and inspects repairs in the right-of-way, between the property line and the curb.

Right-of-way is the area between the property line at the sidewalk and the curb.

### Broken sewer and drain lines permits and repair

REPAIR	REQUIREMENT
Sewer repair between the house and property line (usually at sidewalk)	Plumbing permit and inspection from BDS
Sewer repair in right-of-way, between property line and curb (including sidewalk and parking strip)	Right-of-way sewer repair permit (UR: lateral repair permit) and inspection from PBOT
Sewer connections on a brand-new sewer line	Sewer connection permit (UC: new lateral connection permit) and inspection from PBOT

**Lateral:** the pipe that provides water from the water main in the street to a home or business.

### Stormwater, combination sewers and downspouts

Sewer line leaks and the related rat problems are more common in older parts of the City. These areas often have combination sewers which collect both sewage and stormwater. Stormwater can overwhelm the system and release raw sewage into local waterways. Many old rain drain systems no longer function properly due to poorly jointed, collapsed, or broken pipes allowing soil to leak in and cause additional problems.

Downspouts can be redirected to allow stormwater to drain into the yard or connect to an alternative on-site system, rather than into the sewer. Any disconnection of rain drains or installation of an on-site stormwater system must be pre-approved to ensure that you install an appropriate system, and that it does not create a nuisance for you or your neighbor. You will be required to leave the existing underground rain drain and storm sewer piping system in place for possible future re-connection. Information about disconnecting downspouts is available online at [www.portland.gov/code/17/37](http://www.portland.gov/code/17/37), or the Clean River Rewards program at [www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/41976](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/41976).

### Common sewer line materials and breaks

CONSTRUCTED	SEWER LINE MATERIAL
before mid-1960	Concrete or tile
after 1975	no hub cast iron or plastic
newer	PVC 3034 and ABS schedule 40, also PVC schedule 40 but not common in Portland

### Breaks commonly occur at the:

- connection to the branch lateral at the curb line
- transition from cast iron at the house to clay or cement pipe, about five feet from the dwelling
- p-trap at the transition between the stormwater system and sanitary system

## SIGNS OF A PROBLEM WITH SEWER LINES

**Two common signs of breaks and/or leaks in your sewer line are:**

**Raw sewage or sewage odor:** Contact Neighborhood Inspections at 503-823-2633.

**Rats or rat holes in the yard or parking strip.**

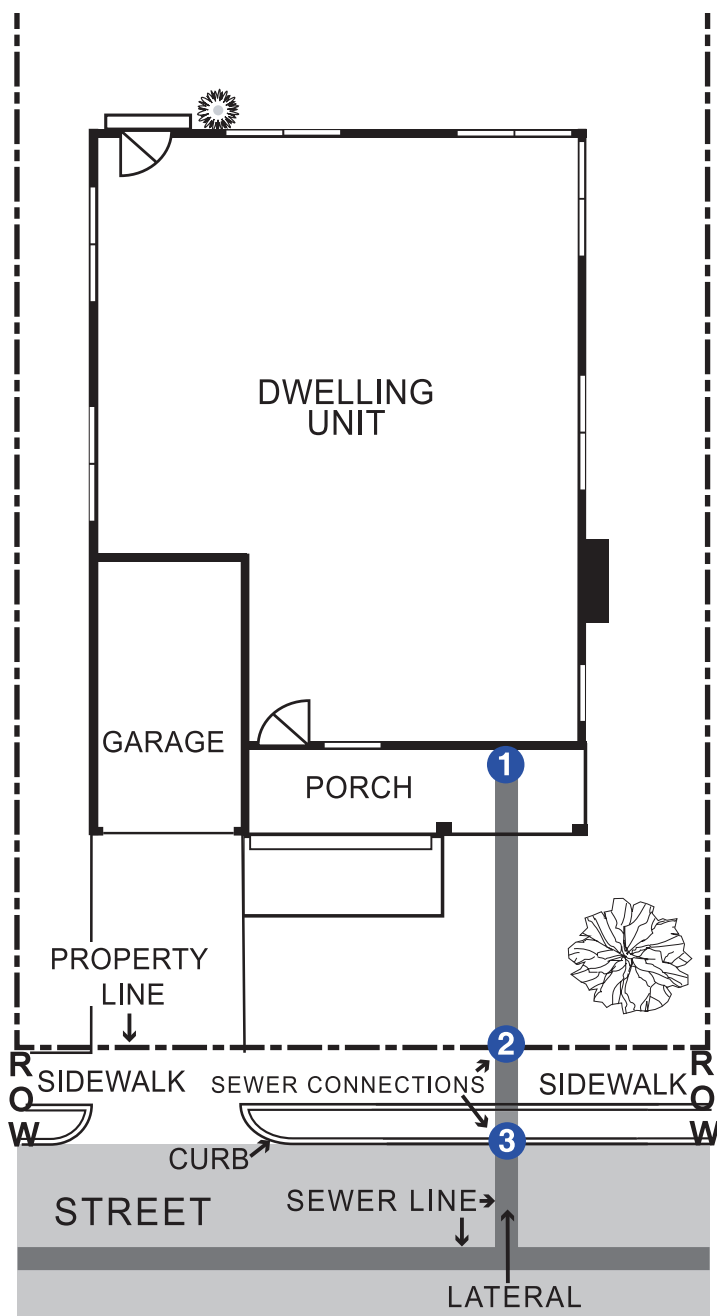
A rat hole is a smooth-looking hole and one that keeps reappearing when filled. If you have a rat hole you can:

- Call Multnomah County Vector Control at 503-988-3464 to bait for rats.
- Call the Bureau of Maintenance at 503-823-1700 to dye test the holes. Dye appearing in the main sewer line indicates damage to your sewer line. The problem will be referred to Neighborhood Inspections in the Bureau of Development Services (BDS) for site inspection, plumbing records verification and identifying responsibility for the repair.

You may also learn of a sewer line problem if we send you a letter informing you that a dye test indicates a break or leak in your sewer line and requires repair.

Note: It is possible for a property owner to be responsible for doing some repairs in the street (for example, a private line running parallel to the curb).

### Identifying responsibility for sewer lines



- The property owner is responsible for the sewer line coming from the house to the curb.
- A BDS Plumbing permit (PT) is required for all work from the house **1** to the property line. **2**
- A UC permit is required for a brand-new sewer connection. PBOT inspects new sewer connections in the right-of-way.
- Newer homes connect at the property line **2** since BES now brings the lateral to the property line. Older homes connect at the curb. **3**
- Repairs that involve pipe between the house **1** and the curb **3** will require both a plumbing permit (PT) and a right-of-way permit (UR) and will require two inspections. These repairs involve the right-of-way.
- Special considerations impact the project once it enters the right-of-way since many utility lines may run underground in this area. Check City requirements for work in the right-of-way. Repairs in this area require a (UR) right-of-way permit and inspection.
- The City is responsible for the public sewer under the street.

## Sewer or drain line repair responsibility

Once the City notifies you that there is a sewer or drain line break or leak on your property, you have 30 days to make repairs or request additional repair time. After 30 days, the City can make the repairs and assess a lien against your property for the cost of the repairs, plus overhead charges and civil penalties.

- **The property owner** is responsible for breaks between the house and the curb including the sidewalk and parking strip located in the right-of-way.
  - If a shared/party sewer line or sewer easement is involved, call the BES Nonconforming Sewer Hotline, 503-823-7869, before starting the repair.
  - Sewer repairs in the right-of-way must be made in accordance with the City's Standard Construction Specifications, BES Rules of Sewer Connection, and City Code. Sewer repairs or sewer replacement in any part of the right-of-way requires a right-of-way repair permit.
- **The City** is responsible for maintenance of sewer laterals from the main sewer, under the street, to the curb line at the right-of-way, and to the connection in the easement area if applicable.

## Appealing a decision about sewer or drain line break or leak

If you receive a notice and believe the City has made an error in identifying a sewer or drain line break or leak on your property, you can have a contractor videotape the line and send the tape or DVD to BES Nonconforming Sewer for a review. Call 503-823-7034 for tape or DVD quality requirements.

**Note:** The video you submit will not be returned.

## Repairing your sewer line- permits and inspections

All work on your sewer line must be permitted and inspected. Permits and inspections protect you and ensure that the work has been done properly.

### Who can do the work:

- Only the property owner or a licensed plumbing contractor can legally work on the sewer line.
- Bonding and insurance must be met by the property owner or the licensed, registered in Oregon plumbing contractor (whoever is doing the work) before starting sewer work in the right-of-way.
- These requirements are in place to protect other utilities found in the right-of-way such as gas, water, cable and underground electrical lines.
- To be safe, remember to Call Before You Dig: 503-246-6699 to have your underground utility lines located.
- Verify sewer main location with BES Nonconforming Sewer Hotline, 503-823-7869 to get copies of maps and City as-builts.

## Common Private Sewer and Nonconforming Sewer system

A “**Common Private Sewer System** (also called **Party Sewer**)” means that portion of a building sewer not owned by the City of Portland that serves more than one building with different ownerships and conveys sanitary sewage to a sewer service lateral, public sewer, private sewage disposal system, or other point of disposal. Common private sewers are found on private property and in private and public rights-of-way, including easements. “**Nonconforming Sewer**” means a private sanitary sewer that is:

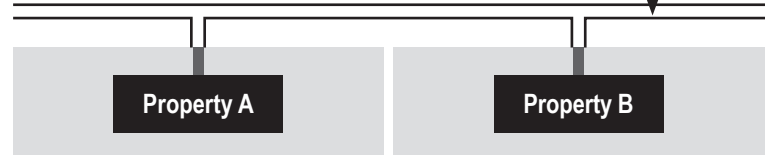
- Located on public or private property that is not on the same property as the structure or structures being served by the sewer; and
- Not located within a recorded sewer easement or subject to a recorded covenant for easement regarding use of the sewer meeting the standards specified in administrative rules.

For more information on Nonconforming Sewers, refer to the Non-Conforming Sewer Connections pamphlet or call 503-823-7869. You may also refer to the BES website at [www.portlandoregon.gov/BES/49974](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/BES/49974).

Diagram 1 Party Sewer Connection



Diagram 2 Connection with Direct Route of Service



## Sewer line repair permits

All sewer line repairs require a permit, inspection and approval prior to covering the pipe. Also:

- A **plumbing permit (PT)** is required for sewer work between the house and the property line.
- A **right-of-way/sewer repair permit (UR/UC)** is required for sewer work in the right-of-way which includes the sidewalk and parking strip to the curb.
- Both **PT and UR/UC permits** are required when sewer line repair involves both the homeowner's property and the right-of-way.

## Sewer line or drain line repairs

- All repairs must meet specific construction standards. Call the Bureau of Development Services Residential Inspections Section, 503-823-7388, with any questions.
- Uncover the part of the pipe that is leaking or broken. The bad section of pipe must be replaced with new pipe. If the drainpipe is old or in poor condition, it is a good idea to replace the entire line.
- Remember to leave the work exposed for inspection.

## Sewer line or drain line inspections

Once new pipe is installed but still exposed, call for an inspection.

For **plumbing permit (PT) inspections**, involving repairs located between house and property line:

- Call 503-823-7000, the BDS 24-hour inspection request line
- Enter your IVR or permit number
- Enter the three-digit inspection code for the type of inspection you are requesting:
  - 350 for sanitary sewer
  - 399 for final plumbing
- Enter a phone number where you can be reached during weekdays and explain if you want the inspection in the morning or afternoon.

For **right-of-way/sewer repair permit (UR/UC) inspections**, involving repairs located between the property line and the street:

- Call 503-823-7002, the Street Systems Management Division of the Bureau of Transportation
- Give us at least a four-hour notice for inspection; provide the following information in your message:
  - permit number
  - job address
  - contractor's name
  - when you would like your inspection
  - your daytime phone number
- Get a copy of Rules for Sewer Connection at the Trade Permit counter in the DSC.

## RESOURCES

### Contact Us

Bureau of Development Services  
 City of Portland, Oregon  
 1900 SW 4th Avenue, Portland, OR 97201  
[www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)

### Office Hours:

Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
 BDS main number: 503-823-7300

### Permit Information is available at the following location:

- Development Services Center (First Floor)  
 For Hours Call 503-823-7310 or visit [www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)
- Permitting Services (Second Floor)  
 For Hours Call 503-823-7310 or visit [www.portland.gov/bds](http://www.portland.gov/bds)

### Important Telephone Numbers

BDS main number .....	503-823-7300
DSC automated information line.....	503-823-7310
Permit information for electrical, mechanical, plumbing, sewer and signs.....	503-823-7363
Building code information .....	503-823-1456
Site Development Services & Sanitation .....	503-823-6892
Zoning information .....	503-823-7526
Permitting process and fee information .....	503-823-7357
Permit resources and records .....	503-823-7660
Residential information for one and two family dwellings....	503-823-7388
Neighborhood Inspections .....	503-823-2663
Maintenance Bureau (dye test) .....	503-823-1700
BES Hotline .....	503-823-7761
BES Clean River Rewards .....	503-823-1371
BES Nonconforming Sewer Hotline .....	503-823-7869
Multnomah County Vector Control .....	503-988-3464
Call before you dig .....	503-246-6699
BDS 24-hour inspection request line (requires IVR number and three-digit inspection code) .....	503-823-7000
PBOT Sewer Repair/Right-of-way Inspection .....	503-823-7002
Oregon Relay Service .....	711

Note: All information in this brochure is subject to change.

Traducción e interpretación | Chuyển Ngữ hoặc Phiên Dịch | 翻译或传译  
 Turjumida ama Fasiraadda | 翻訳または通訳 | Письменный или устный перевод  
 Traducere sau Interpretare | 번역 및 통역 | الترجمة التحريرية أو الشفوية |  
 ການແປພາສາ ຫຼື ການອະທິບາຍ | Письмовий або усний переклад



503-823-7300



BDS@PortlandOregon.gov



[www.portland.gov/bds/brochures-forms/translated-brochures-forms](http://www.portland.gov/bds/brochures-forms/translated-brochures-forms)

The City of Portland is committed to providing meaningful access.  
 For accommodations, modifications, translation, interpretation, or other services,  
 please call **503-823-7300** or the **Oregon Relay Service** at **711**.