

Office of the City Engineer

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Sanitary Sewer Lateral Policy

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Dear Property Owners:

Prior to 2008, the property owner was responsible for any and all repairs to the sanitary sewer lateral which connects their property to the sanitary sewer system. If a problem were to occur within the street, property owners on average would be facing a \$12,000.00 repair bill. This proved to be a severe hardship to many property owners.

Therefore, the City of Racine changed this policy, and on January 1, 2008, the City of Racine took over responsibility for sanitary sewer laterals which fail within the street right-of-way or City easement. Failures refer to structural defects such as a crushed lateral or severely offset joints, but does not include the cleaning or unclogging of the lateral due to roots, deposits or foreign materials. The City will pay for the reasonable cost of investigating the problem, but will not pay for previous cleanings, damage to the building or to its contents.

In order to provide this service, a line appears on your property tax bill titled "Sanitary Sewer Maintenance Fee" with an associated charge, currently set at \$63.00.

If the property owner is having a problem with their sanitary sewer lateral, the first step is to hire a plumbing contractor. If the plumbing contractor believes that a structural defect exists and that it is located beyond the property boundary in the street right-of-way or City easement, they are to contact the City Engineer's Office at (262) 636-9191. If the City concurs that the problem is structural and located in City right-of-way or City easement, then the City will make the needed repairs AT NO COST to the property owner.

If the City disagrees with the assessment of the plumbing contractor, the property owner must either gather additional data or make the needed repairs. The burden of proof rests with the property owner. If it is shown that the structural defect was not on private property, then the City of Racine will reimburse the property owner the cost of investigating the problem and the cost of the required repairs.

All problems on private property are still the responsibility of the property owner and must be paid for by the private property owner.

JCR:njp

Sanitary Sewer Maintenance Fee – FAQ's

1. Why is the fee needed?

In the past, the property owner was responsible for any and all repairs to the sanitary sewer lateral which connects their home with the sanitary sewer in the street. If a problem were to occur within the street, property owners on average would be facing a \$12,000.00 repair bill. This proved to be a severe hardship to many of these property owners. This fee generates a designated source of funds that can only be used to make improvements in the sanitary sewer system, including laterals in City right-of-way or City easement.

2. What has changed and when did it take effect?

Beginning January 1, 2008, the City of Racine took over responsibility for structural failures of the lateral within City right-of-way and City easement.

3. What about cleaning of the lateral?

The property owner is still responsible for the cleaning, removal of roots or deposits which may result in reduced flow or blockage of the lateral.

4. What is the Sanitary Sewer Maintenance Fee paying for?

First and foremost, the property owner is no longer at risk of an unexpected major repair cost due to the failure of the sewer lateral which is located in the street right-of-way or City easement. Secondly, the City will proactively repair or replace suspect laterals in conjunction with major street projects. And, finally, the City will make repairs or replace the mainline sewer as its condition warrants.

5. What do I do if I am having a problem with my sewer lateral?

The first step is to hire a plumbing contractor. The plumbing contractor will investigate the problem. If the plumbing contractor believes that a structural failure exists and that it is located beyond the property line, they can contact the City Customer Service Department at (262) 636-9171, which will direct you to DPW/Engineer's Office.

If the City concurs that the problem is caused by a structural defect within the street right-of-way or City easement, then the City will make the repairs needed AT NO COST to the property owner.

6. What are the chances that my lateral will fail?

More than 50% of the homes in the City of Racine are older than 85 years. The average life of a sewer lateral is 100 years. Therefore, if nothing changed, we predict a significant increase in lateral failures over the next 15 years.

7. My lateral is new or was repaired or replaced prior to 2008. How do I benefit from this project?

Excellent question. By proactively managing sanitary sewer laterals and mainline sewers in conjunction with our paving program, we save tax dollars. This benefits everyone. In addition, improved maintenance and timely replacement will reduce leakage of sewage which can make its way into our river and lake. A cleaner river and lake are a benefit everyone can enjoy.

8. My lateral failed outside of my property and the backup of sewage damaged my basement. Will the City reimburse me for this clean-up?

If the problem is found not to be on your property, the City will pay the reasonable cost to investigate and repair the problem. However, the City will not reimburse the cost of previous cleanings of the line or any damages caused to the building or its contents.