



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESSA
Sanitary Sewer Lateral Blockage
Summary of Potential Causes/Repairs/Costs

One of a homeowner's worst nightmares is a backed up floor drain, especially one that fills the basement with sewage.

One such homeowner's nightmare happened a few months ago after a recent basement bathroom was remodelled.

The first time the new toilet flushed, the bathroom filled up with two inches of water. The next flushing pumped sewage out of the storm drain and into two other rooms. It was time to call the Plumber.

One of the first things that a Plumber always tries is an industrial sized snake. These things are about ¾ of an inch wide and several hundred feet long. The plumber reamed out the sewer line clear to the alley. He didn't seem to run into any obstructions, nor were there pieces of root on the snake when he rolled it back up. He flushed the toilet and the basement filled right back up with sewage again.

"I think that you might have a collapsed line" the Plumber said.

The Diagnostics

The Plumber recommended a video inspection of the sewer line. Line inspections cost approximately \$180.00 (or more) but are the best way to pinpoint a leak or broken line. The Plumber hooked up the camera and began feeding the snake into the pipes. At the 26 foot mark, we noticed a thick, white slurry coating the walls of the pipes. The slurry was so thick, that the drain water only had about a quarter inch opening to pass through. The obstruction continued for another 10 feet, and then the line was clear again all the way to the alley.

The white slurry turned out to be grease. Plain, old, ordinary kitchen grease.

According to the Plumber, kitchen grease tends to collect somewhere in the pipes between 20-25 feet. This is the point where the hot tap water cools off, and liquid grease solidifies. All those years of draining grease down the garbage disposal caused this huge, sticky buildup which was now clogging our sewer line. Every time we flushed the toilet, the sudden gush of drain water hit the obstruction and backed up right into our basement.

There's only one way to fix a sewer line that has been clogged with grease. It takes a high pressure spray washer called a "hydro-jetter", which is fed through the lines like a snake. The hydro-jetter is a large piece of equipment that must be operated at ground level. It is fed through the toilet drain of the ground floor bathroom, and reaches to clear the sewer main in the street or alley. It's loud; it stinks; it splatters sewage over the walls; and it costs approximately \$550.00 (or more).

Six hours later, and approximately \$1000.00 (or more) poorer, we finally had our sewer line clean again. What made the bill even remotely tolerable was the relief in knowing that we didn't have a collapsed line after all.

How to prevent grease build up:

Grease build-up is one of the primary causes of a blocked residential sewer line. While some of it comes from meat fats such as bacon and hamburger grease, it also comes from foods such as cooking oil, mayonnaise, butter, sauces and table scraps. Most people (including myself) thought that running just a little hot water down the sink helped to dissolve the grease. All that this really does is push the grease just a little further down the pipes. Over time, that grease will build up in the sewer line and create those huge obstructions we saw on the video camera.

- a) There's always going to be a little bit of grease coming off of your plates and cooking utensils; it can't be avoided. However, you can reduce the amount of grease going into your lines by taking a few precautions, such as:*
- b) Always scrape cooking grease and oils into a disposable container, rather than pouring it down the drain. Remove the remaining grease with a paper towel and dispose of it in the organic waste container (green bin) as well.*
- c) Place your food scraps in the green organic waste bin instead of running them through the garbage disposal. Disposal may chop the food into bits, but it doesn't do anything to eliminate the grease. Also scrape plates into the green organic waste bin before washing. Throw coffee grounds in the compost or in the green organic waste bin.*

These simple tips are all that is required to keep grease from clogging your pipes and preventing a costly sewer line backup in **your** home.