

## Beware of fraudsters posing as city employees



The Columbus Public Utilities Customer Service Center is again receiving complaints about criminals posing as city workers, knocking on doors trying to collect money for “city utility bills.” Please be aware that our workers never collect money in the field. This includes our Division of Power, Division of Water, and the Division of Sewerage and Drainage. If this happens to you, lock your door and report it to your local law enforcement agency immediately. Sometimes our field crews may give a courtesy knock as they are working in an area, or they may leave a door hanger, but they are not permitted to collect money. City employees carry a city badge with photo and field workers usually wear a uniform and drive a marked city vehicle. When in doubt, please ask to see identification and contact our call center at (614) 645-8276 or email [utilityleadrep@columbus.gov](mailto:utilityleadrep@columbus.gov).

## We all play a role in keeping our water clean, both at the source and the tap

The Columbus Division of Water goes to great lengths to ensure that the water delivered to more than 1.1 million central Ohio customers meets or exceeds all state and federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards. But did you know that we all play a role in preventing water contamination in our drinking water?

As one example, the simple act of filling a pool by submerging a hose into the pool water can create a possible water contamination risk by what is known as backflow. This means a reverse flow of water caused by a loss of pressure in the system. A pipe break or use of a fire hydrant can cause a loss of pressure in the city’s water main. When this occurs, it is possible that the higher pressure water in your plumbing can flow backward, bringing with it possible contaminants. The correct way to fill a pool is shown in the picture to the right, by having the hose above the pool water, and not submerged in it. This is also why faucets are installed above tubs and sinks, to maintain an air gap in the plumbing system and to prevent the backflow of water into the pipes.

Some sources of backflow that can compromise the quality of the water delivered to your home can be directly connected to your plumbing system. Examples include lawn irrigation (“sprinkler”) systems, water powered sump pumps, boilers, wells, geothermal systems and outdoor hoses. You may already be required to have a backflow prevention device on your home because you have a lawn irrigation system.

However, even if you don’t have a sprinkler system, other possible cross connections may exist and you may need to consider installing a backflow prevention device.

Learn more about possible backflow water issues at [columbus.gov/backflow](http://columbus.gov/backflow). If you think you may have connections in your plumbing system that may pose a possible backflow problem, please contact the Backflow Office at (614) 645-6674 or [backflow@columbus.gov](mailto:backflow@columbus.gov).

In addition to helping to preserve the quality of the tap water delivered to your neighborhood by being mindful of backflow risks, there are many other ways to protect our drinking water supplies in our rivers and reservoirs. We all play a role through gardening practices, maintaining our vehicles, picking up after our pets and reporting spills that may enter our waterways.

Please visit our website at [columbus.gov/utilities](http://columbus.gov/utilities) to learn more.



Please join us on Facebook (Columbus Public Utilities) and Twitter (@cdpu)

# Frequently Asked Questions about Sewer Overflows

## What are CSOs and SSOs?

Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) are discharges of wastewater and stormwater from the combined sewer system that serves downtown and the surrounding older areas. Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) are discharges of wastewater from the sanitary sewer system. Sewer overflows can occur at various discharge points along local waterways when volume temporarily exceeds capacity, typically during wet weather.

## Why do sewer overflows exist?

Many years ago, prior to the existence of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or Clean Water Act, it was a common engineering practice to have such relief points in a sewer system to prevent backups into homes during major rain events.

## What is Columbus doing about this issue?

After the City of Columbus entered into consent agreements with the State of Ohio in 2002 (for SSOs) and 2004 (for CSOs), the Department of Public Utilities developed a 40-year Wet Weather Management Plan in 2005. The plan identified a comprehensive schedule of capital improvement projects on the combined and sanitary sewer collection systems and at the two wastewater treatment plants. Many of those are now completed, while other work continues. An update was approved by the Ohio EPA in 2015, known as Blueprint Columbus. This modified 30-year plan includes green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and pervious pavement, along with home sewer lateral lining, roof water redirection and sump pumps in areas prone to wet weather issues.

## Are overflows an issue in other cities?

Yes. Most older, larger cities also have wet weather management plans and consent orders to solve them.

## How are sewer improvements financed?

Sanitary sewer rate revenue and low interest loan funds are used to fund the infrastructure improvements. The Clean River surcharge you see on your Columbus sewer bill is used to pay back the debt incurred on the projects. An affordability analysis was conducted to determine the community's ability to finance the plan. Revenue needs are reviewed annually.

## How will central Ohio residents benefit?

Anything that improves our environment benefits our community. Solving the wet weather issues will also reduce sewer backups into basements. The new Blueprint program will create many permanent local jobs.

## Where are the discharge sites located?

They are along the Olentangy River from Worthington to First Avenue, on the Scioto River from around Neil Avenue to S.R. 104, and on Alum Creek from Main Street to I-70. The locations are marked with signage.

## How many discharge locations are in Columbus?

There are 50 CSO/SSO locations under Columbus responsibility on various waterways that can potentially discharge.

## How often do they overflow?

The most active one is on the Scioto River near Whittier Street, which receives partial treatment. The activity at this CSO location has been reduced through sewer capacity increases and will see further reductions when the Olentangy-Scioto-Interceptor-Sewer Augmentation Relief Sewer (OARS tunnel) is put into service. Tunnel boring for this sewer was completed in 2015. Frequency and volume depend on the amount of rainfall received. Visit [eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/](http://eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/) for more information.

## If I see an overflow sign, is it safe to swim?

No. First, be aware that swimming in Columbus waterways is prohibited by Columbus City Code and is considered a drowning risk in some locations due to lowhead dams and utility crossings. Avoid water contact near a marked overflow location, especially following periods of heavy rain. For more information on possible health and environmental effects, please visit the web address above.

## Can residents help prevent overflows?

Yes. Please check your downspouts and foundation drains to make sure they are not connected to the sanitary sewer. These outdated connections, common in homes built before 1963, add excess water to the system during rain events, and contribute to overflows and basement backups. For instructions on how to disconnect downspouts, please visit our document library at [columbus.gov/utilities](http://columbus.gov/utilities). If your foundation drain is connection to the sanitary sewer, you may need a sump pump to direct it into the stormwater system. Disposing of grease properly to avoid blockages in city and home sewers is also important. Place grease in the trash in a sealed container such as a coffee can; do not pour down the drain. Never flush disposable wipes, even those labeled "flushable" because they do not disintegrate and can cause sewer clogs. Additionally, please attend to any needed repairs on your home sewer line.

## Should residents report overflows and backups?

Yes. Please report any visible sewer overflows or basement backups in Columbus immediately to the 24-hour Sewer Maintenance Operations Center at (614) 645-7102 or through 311. Reporting a basement sewer backup promptly is also necessary to determine eligibility for the Project Dry Basement backflow prevention program for single and two-family homes in Columbus. If your home is determined to be eligible, an application will be mailed.

For more information about Blueprint Columbus, visit [columbus.gov/blueprint](http://columbus.gov/blueprint).

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COLUMBUS**  
Clean streams.  
Strong neighborhoods.