

# utility update

Summer 2020

[columbus.gov/utilities](http://columbus.gov/utilities)

## It's Easy to be a GreenSpot

GreenSpot inspires, educates and recognizes individuals, community groups and businesses that adopt sustainable practices. Are you ready to be inspired? Benefits of joining include ideas to be green, a personal spot on the website to track your green successes, a GreenSpot decal, rebates on rain barrels and native trees/plants (for eligible households), and being part of a larger movement. Are you doing any of the items below? If so, it is easy to be a GreenSpot!



### GreenSpot for Individuals

With just three key commitments you can create a more environmentally friendly home. Within each commitment you decide which options fit you best, such as: changing out your light bulbs to CFL or LEDs,

recycling, and installing low-flow water fixtures. More than 40 different pledges to choose from!

### GreenSpot for Business

Is your business looking for ways to improve air, water and energy quality while reducing waste, pollution and expense? Becoming a GreenSpot Business can help you meet your goals.



### GreenSpot for Neighborhoods

GreenSpot Neighborhood is a great way to bring together residents and businesses to make commitments that are unique for your community. Benefits include ideas for best practices, support

from the City to develop your plan, and recognition from the City. Discovery District, Sawmill Place Community, Clintonville, and German Village have made the pledge.



### Programs

GreenSpot is made up of many programs including GreenSpot Kids, GreenSpot Schools, Community Backyards, and Neighborhoods. Your business could be eligible to go through GreenSpot's Sustainable Business Course which brings businesses together to share experiences, successes and lessons learned while fulfilling their GreenSpot commitments. Experts will help you improve your business' sustainability. This 6-session class is free.

### GreenSpotLight Awards

The GreenSpotLight Awards go to businesses that demonstrate excellence in business practices that produce environmental benefits. These awards go to a small, medium, and large business. Other GreenSpot business members get recognized on social media and in the GreenSpot eNewsletters which go out to 20,000 people.

Join the more than 20,000 GreenSpot members in making our neighborhoods more sustainable!

Share what you've learned and inspire others at [facebook.com/columbusgreenspot](https://facebook.com/columbusgreenspot) and on Twitter @GreenSpotCbus. Learn more at [www.ColumbusGreenSpot.org](http://www.ColumbusGreenSpot.org)!

## Discount Programs and Basement Flooding Applications Now Online

We have streamlined the process to submit forms for the Low Income Water/Sewer, Senior Citizen Power and Senior Citizen Water/Sewer discount programs. Now you can submit an application directly online and upload the required supporting documents. Learn more about these programs and apply at [columbus.gov/utilitydiscounts/](http://columbus.gov/utilitydiscounts/).

In addition, you can now file an online report to see if your property is eligible for **Project Dry Basement**. This program will cover the cost of an approved backflow prevention device for single and two-family homes in Columbus that have experienced sewer backups during wet weather. **Sewer backups must be reported immediately to the 24-hour Sewer Maintenance Operations Center at 614-645-7102.** If your property is verified to be eligible, you will receive an application in the mail. However, now you can also file a report online at [columbus.gov/floodingquestionnaire/](http://columbus.gov/floodingquestionnaire/) or visit [columbus.gov/projectdrybasement/](http://columbus.gov/projectdrybasement/) to learn more about the program.

## 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.

### Are overflows an issue in other cities?

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

### What is Columbus doing about this issue?

After the city entered into consent agreements with the state in 2002 (SSOs) and 2004 (CSOs), our department developed a 40-year Wet Weather Management Plan. It identified a comprehensive schedule of improvements on the combined and sanitary sewer collection systems and at the two wastewater treatment plants. To specifically target SSOs, Blueprint Columbus was developed to address overflows by lining home sewer laterals, preventing stormwater infiltration. That stormwater is then redirected through

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Clean streams.  
Strong neighborhoods.

new downspouts and sump pumps to green infrastructure before filtering into our rivers and streams. For more information about Blueprint Columbus, please visit [columbus.gov/blueprint](http://columbus.gov/blueprint).

### How will central Ohio residents benefit?

Anything that improves our environment benefits our community. Solving wet weather issues also reduces sewer backups into basements. If you live in a Blueprint neighborhood, you may be eligible for roof water redirection, lateral lining, and sump pump installation at no direct cost to you.

### How are sewer improvements financed?

Sanitary sewer rate revenue and low interest loans fund these infrastructure improvements. The Clean River surcharge you see on your Columbus sewer bill is used to repay the debt incurred on the projects. An affordability analysis was conducted to determine the

community's ability to finance the plan, and revenue needs are reviewed annually.

### How many are there and where are they located?

There are around 50 locations under Columbus responsibility on various waterways that can discharge. 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 often do they overflow?

Frequency and volume depend on the amount of rainfall received. Visit [eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/](http://eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/) for more information.

### Should residents report overflows and backups?

Yes, please report any 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. If your home is determined to be eligible, an application will be mailed, or you may apply online at [columbus.gov/floodingquestionnaire/](http://columbus.gov/floodingquestionnaire/).

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

No. First, swimming in Columbus waterways is prohibited by 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 [eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/](http://eapp.columbus.gov/ssocso/).

### Can residents help prevent overflows?

Yes. Please check your downspouts and foundation drains to confirm 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/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 connected to the sanitary sewer, you may need a sump pump to direct it into the stormwater system. Properly disposing of grease also helps prevent sewer blockages. 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 clogs. Additionally, please attend to any needed repairs on your home sewer line.

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