

utility update

Summer 2022

columbus.gov/utilities

Utility Bill Payment and Assistance Options

Paying your City of Columbus utility bill has never been easier. Customers have a variety of options to pay their city water, sewer, stormwater or electric bills:

- **By mail:** using the address on your bill.
- **Phone:** Call 1-800-824-2375 (24/7).
- **Online:** through our secure Customer Portal, found at columbus.gov/utilities, where you can also sign up for an e-bill, auto draft, or make a one-time payment as needed. *Consumer tip:* to find our portal, enter from our web address above. Internet searches may turn up third party vendors who add additional fees. Another way to pay online is to use your bank's online bill pay feature.
- **In person:**
 - 24-hour drop box at the Michael B. Coleman Government Center, 111 N. Front Street.
 - Western Union locations throughout the central Ohio area. A list of locations can be found at columbus.gov/utilities/customers/Utility-Bill-Payment-Locations/.



If you meet the income guidelines for the utility bill assistance program, please also apply for the low income discount, which could save you 20% off water and sewer consumption charges in the future. If age 60 or over, you may also qualify for a senior discount. Please visit columbus.gov/payassist for more information or call 614-645-8276.

Everyone Can Save on Their Bills

Summer can bring the highest water bill of the year if you water your lawn or use slip and slides, kiddie pools etc. Remember that a healthy lawn only needs 1" of water a week and to check weather forecasts before watering. Leaking toilets are another high bill culprit. If you hear your toilet when no one has recently used it, or have to jiggle the handle to make it stop, you may have a leak. Silent leaks can be found by adding food coloring in the upper tank, and waiting an hour to see if it flows down into the bowl.

Everyone can save money on their utility bills by watching consumption of water and power and by making timely repairs to leaky toilets and fixtures.

Fell Behind on Your Bill?

Assistance is available to eligible city water, sewer, stormwater and power customers in Columbus as funds remain available. This program offers a one-time credit of up to \$750 toward an eligible water/sewer/stormwater bill (for Columbus residents only) and/or up to \$500 toward an eligible Columbus electric (non-AEP) bill. To apply online, please visit columbus.gov/payassist. For questions or help applying, please contact Customer Service at 614-645-8276 (weekdays 7AM - 6PM) or email: BillAssist@columbus.gov.

If you want to set up a payment arrangement to get caught up on your bill, please visit columbus.gov/payassist to request one, or call Customer Service at 614-645-8276.

Conservation tips are on our web site at columbus.gov/utilities/conserve. If you would like leak detection materials sent to you, please call or email the Call Center at 614-645-8276 or UtilityLeadRep@columbus.gov.



Please follow 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 the downtown and 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 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 common design for such relief points to exist in a sewer system to prevent backups into homes during wet weather and major rain events.

Are overflows an issue in other cities?

Yes. Solving wet-weather issues is the biggest challenge facing most sewer districts today.

What is Columbus doing about this issue?

The Department of Public Utilities developed a Wet Weather Management Plan in 2005, identifying an estimated \$2.5 billion in capital improvements over 40 years 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 new downspouts and sump pumps to green infrastructure before filtering into our rivers and streams. Please see columbus.gov/utilities/projects/clean-rivers/ and columbus.gov/blueprint/ for more information.

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 loan programs, such as the Water Pollution Control Loan Fund through the Ohio EPA, finance these infrastructure improvements. The Clean River surcharge 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.

Where are the overflow points located?

Discharge locations 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 and other factors. Visit eapp.columbus.gov/ssoco/ for more information.

Should residents report overflows and backups?

Yes, please report any suspected 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 the first step 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, or apply at: columbus.gov/floodingquestionnaire/.



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

No. First, be aware that swimming in local waters is prohibited by city code and is considered a drowning risk in some locations due to lowhead dams and utility crossings. To avoid possible negative health effects, always avoid water contact (including boating, wading, fishing, and swimming) near a sewer overflow location, especially following periods of heavy rain. For more information on possible health and environmental effects, please visit:

epa.gov/npdes/2004-npdes-cso-report-congress.

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. 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 to prevent excess water from entering the system through cracks (often caused by tree roots).