

# FAQs



## Q: Why do I have to sign a release? What does it say?

A: The release protects the city from repeated claims arising from the same incident. When you sign it, you acknowledge receipt of payment to compensate you for damages to your property, you release the city from any future claims arising from this incident, and you agree to install a backflow check valve on your sewer service line. The release specifically notes that the terms of the release transfer to future property owners.

## Q. What is a backflow check valve, and why do I have to install it?

A. A backflow check valve acts as a one-way gate on your sewer connection. Sewage can flow out from your house to the sewer main, but sewage from the sewer main cannot flow in. The plumbing code has required backflow devices on sewer connections since 1930, however, many properties do not have them. By installing and maintaining a backflow device, you are protecting your property from future backflows.

## Q. Why does the city compensate for damages only on the first occurrence at an address?

A. If the city has previously compensated the owner of a property for damages under the Good Neighbor Policy, that owner signed a release agreeing to install a backflow device to prevent future backflows. The city cannot be responsible for owners who did not keep their agreement, or did not keep their backflow device maintained.

## Q. What if I'm just renting this house?

A. You may file a claim for damages to your personal property. The property owner is responsible for filing a claim for damages to the house.

## Q. Why does the city not pay for a blockage in my sewer connection?

A. If a blockage in the main line backs up into your house, you have been damaged by events beyond your control. However, the sewer service line running from your house out to the main sewer line is part of your home plumbing. It serves only your house, and you control the amount of fats, oils, grease and other items that go down your drain that can create a blockage.

If you have questions about your situation, call Monday-Friday 7:30 AM - 5:00 PM, **727-2572**; Evenings, Weekends, Holidays **727-2345**.



[www.cityofws.org/utilities](http://www.cityofws.org/utilities)

8-2007

# “Good Neighbor Policy” (Assistance for Residents)

The fact that you have experienced a sewer backflow indicates that your house may not be in compliance with the N.C. State Plumbing Code. The code requires installation of backflow valves to prevent sewage from backing up into houses.

Under the City/County Utility Commission’s Good Neighbor Policy, you may be eligible to receive compensation for damages caused by a sewer backflow into your home if a backflow valve is required and you do not have one.

Reimbursement for damages caused by a sewer backflow may be considered ONLY IF:

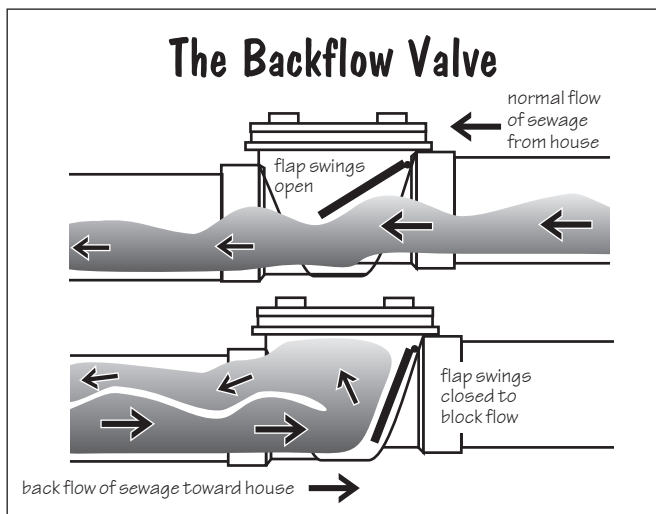
1. the backflow was caused by a blockage in the main sewer line and not in the connection to your home;
2. this is the first sewer backflow at this address;
3. you sign a release waiving any further claims in exchange for payment; and
4. you agree to install a backflow valve in your connection line to prevent future problems.

If the city determines that you are eligible for compensation and your property is insured for the damages to your home, the city may pay any deductible that may apply, up to \$1,000. If your property is not insured, the city may reimburse you up to \$15,000 for damage to your home upon being presented with itemized invoices from the person or company performing the restoration. The city may also reimburse you for the fair market value of the personal property damaged or destroyed by this backflow, up to a maximum of \$5,000. The city reserves the right to review and adjust all invoices and claims submitted and will reimburse only those costs found to be reasonable and necessary.

*DISCLAIMER: The Good Neighbor Policy is not an admission of liability by the City/County Utility Commission. The commission retains and asserts all available defenses regarding the backflow into your home.*

## What do you do if you experience a problem...?

- 1. Clean-up and identify a contractor who can assist you.** (see the yellow pages)
- 2. Contact the city's Risk Management Office at 727-2572.** Be prepared to give your name, address and the date of the backflow. The office will open a file on your case and assist the Utility Commission in handling your case.
- 3. Submit a list of personal property damaged or destroyed by this back flow.** The list should include the purchase price (or your best estimate), the age of each item, and photographs, if any, that show the items. Submit itemized invoice(s) from contractors or businesses that cleaned up and repaired your home. Be sure that your name and address is on any document you submit. Documents may be mailed to:  
*City of Winston-Salem, P.O. Box 2511, Winston-Salem, NC 27101*
- 4. Risk Management will review your claim and make a recommendation to the Utility Commission.** A claims adjuster may contact you.
- 5. Arrange to have a backflow valve installed on your sewer connection.** This device is required by the plumbing code and is designed to protect your property from backflows in the future. **THE CITY WILL NOT COMPENSATE YOU FOR DAMAGES IF YOU DO NOT AGREE TO HAVE A BACKFLOW VALVE INSTALLED.**



- 6. Upon settlement of your claim, a check will be prepared.** Utilities Division staff will contact you and arrange to have you sign a release waiving any further claims. You will receive the check when you sign the release.

## Getting your property cleaned

YOU will decide how to clean and repair your home and what items are not salvageable and may need to be thrown away. The City will not offer any advice or expertise in making these decisions.

YOU may hire whoever you want to clean up and repair your home.

Businesses that clean up and repair wastewater damage can be found in the telephone book yellow pages under "water damage restoration." Many are on call 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

NOTE: The contractor that you hire is not employed by the city. YOU will hire the contractor of your choice. YOU will be responsible for all dealings with the contractor and for ensuring that the work is done to your satisfaction. The city makes no representations or endorsements of the quality of their work.

