



# City of Santa Barbara's Sewer Lateral Inspection Program

## Backwater Valves and Prevention of Sewer Backups

Ugh! Sewer backups are not only unpleasant and inconvenient, but can also result in costly damages. A backwater valve may help prevent a potential sewer backup from occurring in your property.

### What is a Backwater Valve?

A Backwater Valve is a device designed to automatically close when sewage backs up into the building from a blocked public sewer, thus impeding the flow of sewage into the property.

### Why Would You Need a Backwater Valve?

The majority of houses in Santa Barbara have been built so that a blockage in the public sewer will not cause a sewage backup into the property. If a backup occurs, it is usually due to roots or debris in the owner's sewer lateral (the pipe that connects the property to the public sewer).

However, some properties require the protection of a backwater valve in the property's sewer lateral line. Home, businesses, and other structures with drainage fixtures such as shower pan, tub, toilet, or sink rim that is located below the elevation of the next upstream maintenance hole cover, are required to install and maintain an "approved" backwater valve.

### Does Your Property Requires a Backwater Valve?

One simple way to tell if you are required to install a backwater valve is to consider your location in relation to the nearby sewer system that services yours and the surrounding properties. Imagine there is a street on a gradual hill, there are three homes on this street and the sanitary sewer drains is located at the top of the hill. If the homes further down the hill are below the top of the sanitary sewer, then there is a good chance that the sewer will backflow into those homes.

#### This Backwater Valve Diagram Will Let You Know



Per City of Santa Barbara Municipal Code 5639 (<http://qcode.us/codes/santabarbara/>), if any of the following occurs, your property will need a Backwater Valve installed that meets the requirements of the California Plumbing Code Section 710.1 (<https://up.codes/codes/california/>):

1. An addition, alteration, or repair to a building with a valuation that exceeds \$1,000
2. An addition, alteration, or repair made to a plumbing system or fixture that requires a permit

# Backwater Valve: Frequently Asked Questions



## What Should I Check For?

1. If you have any plumbing fixtures lower than the street in front of your house, you may need a backwater valve.
2. If the street outside your house runs steeply uphill, you may need a backwater valve.
3. If your property already has a backwater valve, it needs to be checked and maintained annually.



## Who is Responsible for the Installation and Maintenance of the Backwater Valve?

Property owners are responsible for the installation and maintenance of backwater valves. If you think you might need a backwater valve, or if you have questions about locating or checking the device, the City encourages you to contact a licensed plumber who can evaluate your situation and, if necessary, install a backwater valve.



## Do I Need a Permit to Install a Backwater Valve?

Yes, a City plumbing permit is required for the installation of a Backwater Valve. For permit information, contact the City's Building and Safety Division at (805) 564-5485.



## How Often Should I Check a Backwater Valve?

We recommend that you check and maintain the valve at least once a year. If you have a history of sewer blockages, you should check it more often. For any maintenance questions or issues, please contact a licensed plumber.



## Other Helpful Tips to Prevent Sewer Backups

1. **Regular maintenance of your sewer lateral line** will prevent obstructed flow. Roots from trees, large shrubs, and plants are attracted to wastewater. So if your lateral line is cracked, roots will gravitate towards the water and nutrients source, enter the line, and eventually interfere with the flow.
2. **Do not dispose trash items into the City's sewer** through toilets, sinks, or storm drains. Backups can result from bulky trash items clogging your line because your property's sewer lateral may be as small as three inches in diameter.
3. **Do not dispose oils, fats, or grease into the City's sewer** through toilets, sinks, or storm drains. It is a violation of the Municipal Code for anyone who disposes these substances, regardless of source, through a sewer. Commercial operations such as restaurants are required to have a grease trap. Industrial wastewater generators are required to install a pre-treatment facility to process water prior disposal.

If you are not the property owner and want to protect yourself against potential uninsurable damage to your personal property, share these maintenance and preventive tips to your landlord, property manager or owner.



## Get City's Professional Support

The City of Santa Barbara's Sewer Lateral Inspection Program (SLIP) was established to serve the community by detecting and notifying property owners of sewer lateral defects, and to provide professional support in repairing and maintaining private sewer laterals and plumbing elements related to it, like a Backwater Valve.

Please, visit [SantaBarbaraCA.gov/BackwaterValve](http://SantaBarbaraCA.gov/BackwaterValve) for more information or to get SLIP Staff support.



**Contact:** Available hours: 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. M-Th and every other Friday.

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SLIP Team Availability Sessions and Informational Meetings are held at the El Estero Water Resource Center's Conference Room every third Wednesday of each month from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Please, visit [SantaBarbaraCA.gov/SlipEvents](http://SantaBarbaraCA.gov/SlipEvents) to register at any of our offered events, or to schedule an appointment with our SLIP Team staff.