



Downspout and Sewer FAQ's

Q: Why do I need to disconnect my downspouts or sump pump?

A: The stormwater entering the sewer system from these connections takes up space in the system and at the wastewater treatment plant, causing the sewers to back up into basements and streets or overflow into the East Branch Portage River.

Q: How do I know if my downspouts or sump pump are connected?

A: Downspouts that disappear into the ground are most likely incorrectly connected to the public sanitary sewer system. Water from downspouts should discharge into your yard or an appropriate drainage structure.

Your crawl space or basement sump pump should also discharge into your yard. If it is connected to any other pipe in your home, it is most likely incorrectly connected to the public sewer system. However, if your sump pump is connected to your washing machine, water softener, or bathroom, it should be directed to the sanitary sewer and not to your yard.

Q: How much will it cost to disconnect?

A: It will vary depending on the type of incorrect connection. You can disconnect most downspouts yourself for \$100 or less.

Sump pump disconnections, however, require a knowledge of plumbing and electrical work. The cost will vary depending on the complexity of the connection. Your plumber or home improvement professional can give you an estimate for the work.

Q: Can I perform the work on my own?

A: It is possible to disconnect downspouts and sump pumps yourself. If you are unfamiliar with plumbing work, do not attempt to disconnect your sump pump; contact a licensed and bonded plumber or approved home improvement professional for help.

Q: How do I find a licensed and bonded plumber or approved home improvement professional?

A: Ask friends, co-workers, or neighbors to recommend one. Always ask these professionals to show you evidence they are licensed and bonded.

Q: Where should I direct the water flow?

A: Overflow from a downspout or sump pump should flow onto your property and soak into the ground. Never direct the water onto a neighbor's property, street, right-of-way, or easement.

Q: Can I get around obstacles and slope problems using basic downspout material?

A: You can use a combination of elbows and extensions to help route water away from property lines, trees, shrubs, and pathways to a proper location.

Q: Can downspouts and sump pumps be connected to a storm sewer?

A: Yes, they can be connected to a storm sewer. However, if your sump pump contains water from your water softener, washing machine, bathtub, or shower, it should not be connected to the storm sewer.

Q: Do I need a permit to direct my downspout and sump pump overflow to a storm sewer?

A: Yes a permit will be required. Contact the City for additional information.

Q: What kind of water should not be discharged into my yard?

A: Drainage from sinks, washers, bathtubs, showers, water softeners, swimming pools, and toilets must never be discharged into your yard or property. Only clear stormwater should be discharged into your yard.

Q: Does the City Ordinances prevent connecting downspouts and sump pumps to sanitary sewers?

A: The City code prevents connecting downspouts and sump pumps to sanitary sewers. The extra stormwater entering the sewer system from these incorrect connections overloads the system and can cause water to back up into basements and streets or overflow into the East Branch Portage River.

Q: What if disconnecting my downspouts or sump pump will cause flooding in my neighbor's yard or the street, and there is no other alternative?

A: Downspouts can provide water for your garden and landscape. Where stormwater does cause ponding in your yard or in the street, you can install a drainage structure, such as a rain barrel, rain garden, drainage swale, or pond. Talk to a home improvement professional for ideas and information that will fit your yard's size and configuration. Also check the Internet for information. One good website is rainscapes.org,

Q: What if I choose not to disconnect?

A: Every downspout and sump pump that is connected to the sanitary sewer system is currently contributing to sewer capacity issues. The extra water flowing into the system will either overflow into the East Branch Portage River, or it will back up into basements and streets. These problems cause sewer rates to increase, costing you more money.

Also, downspouts connected to the sewer system are essentially open drains into the sewer system. Leaves and dirt can easily get into the sewers and clog them, causing backups into basement and streets, and also degrading the pipes. This again costs you money, either directly or through sewer rates, for repairs to personal and public property.

If the property owner refuses to comply, the City may undertake necessary corrective measures to bring the property into compliance and assess the costs of such corrective measures to the property owner.

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