



TREE ROOTS IN THE SEWER?

Frequently Asked Questions

What does my sewer look like? Generally, your sewer lateral is 4 to 6 inches in diameter and is made of vitrified clay or iron pipe. The sewer lateral is anywhere from 2 to 6 feet underground and runs from your house to a main line connection in the street. There are various joints along the lateral and where the lines connect to the house and the main line under the street. These joints generally use rubber or other soft material to seal the connections.

Who maintains the lateral? The homeowner is responsible for maintaining the sewer lateral from the connection at the house to the connection at the main line under the street. Another public agency, the Costa Mesa Sanitary District, owns and is responsible for maintaining the main line under the street.

How did the roots get in the sewer? Trees, bushes and plants need water and nutrients in order to survive and will grow in response to a source of water and nutrients. Generally, when roots encounter the sewer lateral, nothing will happen because they will grow over and around the lateral. However, if there is a leak, no matter how small, tiny hair like roots will enter the leak and rapidly grow on the nutrient rich material in the lateral. Eventually, they may block the lateral and back-up the system.

Who is responsible for root damage? The City policy on the responsibility for proving that roots actually caused the problem and for identifying the party responsible for repair has changed. Property owners are no longer burdened with proving that the roots were the cause of the problem and not merely growing in response to leaking pipes.

If the homeowner has documented root intrusion and blockage of the sewer lateral and the lateral is within ten (10') feet horizontally from the location of the tree, the City will, at the request of the homeowner, remove the tree at no charge to the resident. This is the sole remedy provided by the City; the homeowner must sign a waiver acknowledging that the City will have no further financial obligation beyond the removal of the tree.

The repair or replacement of the sewer lateral, and any costs associated with that action, is the sole responsibility of the property owner and not the responsibility of the City.

The property owner must provide documentation, in the form of a DVD or video of the interior of the pipe, prepared by a licensed plumber, with distance measurements included as the line is inspected or by physically exposing and removing a section of the sewer lateral within ten feet of the City parkway tree to allow the City to verify the root intrusion.

I want the tree removed! The City has established criteria that permit the removal of trees. For further information on removing trees, please contact the Public Services Division at (714) 754-5123.

I want to file a claim! The law provides specific guidelines for filing a claim with a municipality. For further information on obtaining a claim form, please contact the Risk Management Division at (714) 754-5228.