

Boulder's sanitary sewer system consists of underground pipes that utilize gravity to collect and transport untreated wastewater from residential, commercial, and industrial properties to the city's wastewater treatment facility. If there is a blockage or too much water in a sanitary sewer pipe, wastewater may back up through drains in private basements, crawlspaces, sinks, showers or toilets.

Backwater Valves

Boulder water customers, especially those with below-ground properties, may choose to install backwater valves to help prevent sewer backups. Backwater valves are designed to temporarily block sewer pipes and prevent sewage from flowing back into private drains.

Closed backwater valves do not allow flows to pass through the sewer pipe, preventing wastewater from leaving the property or backing up into drains. While backwater valves are closed, property owners cannot use or drain any water. Once backwater valves are reopened, wastewater resumes its regular flows down drains and through sewer pipes.

Licensed plumbers should evaluate each property's specific plumbing configurations to determine whether a backwater valve is appropriate and then provide recommendations about the correct types of devices to use and where to install them.

All types of backwater valves must be regularly cleaned, inspected, tested and maintained to ensure that they are functioning properly. A City of Boulder [plumbing permit](#) and [inspection](#) are required and all types of backwater valves must be installed on existing sanitary sewer lines by a [licensed plumbing contractor](#).

Private property owners can also purchase insurance coverage for sewer backups. Visit bouldercolorado.gov/water/flood-insurance or www.floodsmart.gov for details.