

OP8129 - Clearing Blocked Private Sewer Pipes Policy

Policy Owner	Executive Manager Customer Delivery
Policy Author	Manager Field Services and Support
Supporting Legislation & Documents	Land Title Act 1994 (QLD) Plumbing and Drainage Act 2018 (QLD) South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009 (QLD) Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 (QLD)
Documents Directly Related	Pr9005 - Manage Sewer Private House Drain Blockages Procedure Pr9006 - Blocked Sewer Identification Fee Claim Processing Procedure Pr10458 - Customer Care Process for Internal Surcharge F8637 - Plumbers Blocked Sewer Identification Fee Form

1. Policy Statement

Unitywater will respond to and remedy all blockages and sewage overflows located or originating from Unitywater's sewerage infrastructure up to and including the inspection opening (IO or IOS) to all private properties connected to Unitywater's sewerage network.

Private plumbers are prohibited to carry out any construction or maintenance work, including the clearing of blockages, within Unitywater's sewerage infrastructure.

Unitywater will reimburse a private plumber up to (and capped at) the maximum published amount for identifying a blockage within the Unitywater sewerage network.

2. Purpose and Objectives

This policy sets out the rights and responsibilities of both Unitywater and private property owners in clearing sewerage infrastructure which includes clearing of blocked sewer pipes, sewer 'jump ups' and private house drains.

3. Policy Scope/Coverage

This policy is applicable to all Unitywater team members and contractors, consultants, volunteers, students or external labour hire engaged by or associated with Unitywater and involved with the processing of sewer blockage and sewage overflow notifications and the subsequent clearing of blockages and cleaning up of sewage overflows within Unitywater's sewerage network or within private drains. Additionally, this policy applies to private plumbers who are engaged by private property owners to investigate and clear private drains.

This policy applies equally to the clearing of blockages in residential premises and non-residential private sewers.

The management of sewer blockages and sewage overflows will be dictated by the following policy scope.

3.1 Responsibility for sewerage infrastructure maintenance and alteration

- Unitywater is responsible for maintaining sewerage infrastructure within its service area up to and *including* Inspection Opening (IO) for each private property.
- The private property owner is responsible for maintaining (including replacing, for any reason) the private drain from the building up to and *excluding* the Inspection Opening (IO).

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- If a private property owner wishes to raise or lower an Inspection Opening to Surface (IOS) then the owner should engage a plumber to do the work. Unitywater will not reimburse the owner for this work.

Figure 1 depicts the division of responsibility.

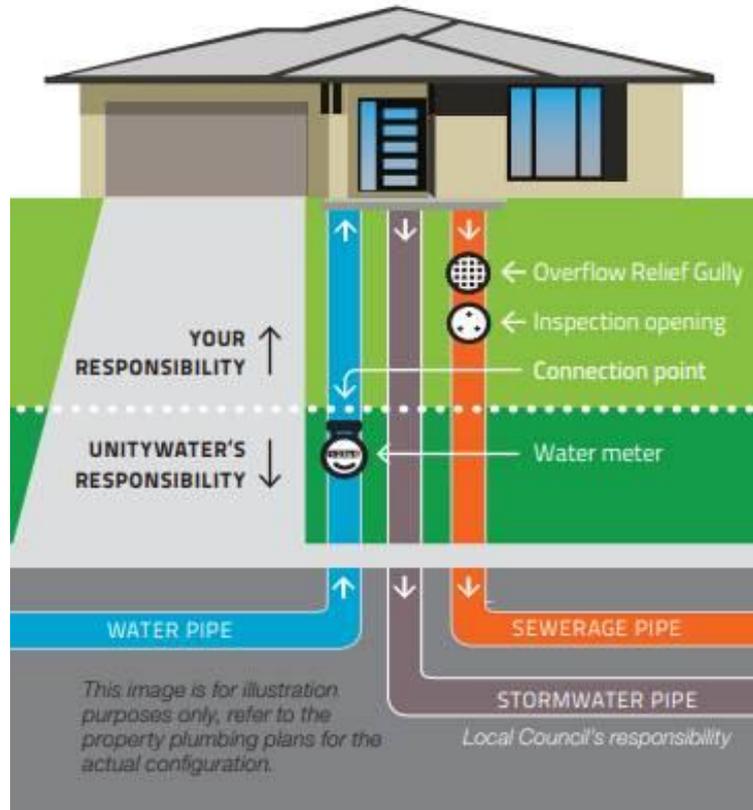


Figure 1 – Division of responsibilities for sewerage infrastructure

3.2 Events to which Unitywater will respond

Unitywater will respond to private sewer blockages and sewage overflows in the following instances:

- All sewage overflows onto land used for public purposes, including continuous sewage overflows;
- Sewer blockage events affecting multiple properties within the same area at the same time potentially indicating a blockage within Unitywater's infrastructure;
- When a customer (private property owner) has been impacted by inundation of sewage (surcharge) inside the dwelling; and
- When an attending private plumber advises Unitywater that they have identified a blockage within Unitywater's infrastructure.

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3.3 Events for which Unitywater will require the private property owner to contract a private plumber

Unitywater will refer private property owners to contract a private plumber in the following circumstances:

- An overflow event where the information provided by the customer (Private property owner) indicates that the cause lies within the private drain; and/or
- Sewer blockage affecting a single property, where the indication is that the blockage occurs within the private drain.

The private property owner is liable for all costs related to all work performed by private plumbers or Unitywater team members where Unitywater decides to investigate the blockage and finds the fault is located within the private drain and the private property owner subsequently authorises Unitywater to undertake work on the private drain to remove the blockage.

3.4 Obligations of attending private plumbers

Private plumbers who have been contracted by private property owners to perform work on private drains:

- may inspect Unitywater infrastructure, using the IO, for the purpose of ascertaining whether a blockage has occurred downstream of the IO (i.e. within the Private property owner's area of responsibility);
- are not permitted to open or otherwise access Unitywater infrastructure, such as manholes, etc.;
- are prohibited from performing any construction or maintenance work on Unitywater infrastructure, including the clearing of blockages located within Unitywater sewer jumps ups and sewer mains;
- must contact Unitywater immediately upon diagnosing a blockage within Unitywater's infrastructure; and
- must not charge the customer for works included in the identification of a blockage within Unitywater's infrastructure.

3.5 Payment to private plumbers for identifying blockages within Unitywater sewerage infrastructure

Private plumbers are eligible for payment from Unitywater up to (and capped at) the maximum published amount in circumstances where after inspection but before commencing any clearing works, they have identified a blockage in Unitywater's infrastructure, notified Unitywater and submitted a valid sewer blockage identification fee claim.

Unitywater will validate a plumber's claim prior to issuing any payment.

Prior to issuing any payment to a private plumber, Unitywater is obligated to ensure that the plumber has not already charged the private property owner for work in identifying a blockage within Unitywater's infrastructure.

Private plumbers must not issue any bill to the private property owner for any work undertaken to confirm blockage is located within Unitywater infrastructure, but must make such claims directly to Unitywater.

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3.6 Clearing of private drains by Unitywater

If Unitywater is on-site and diagnoses a drain blockage, Unitywater services may be offered to the private property owner to clear the identified private drain blockage in accordance with published fees (refer to Unitywater internet '[blocked sewer](#)' web page).

3.7 Sewage overflows within dwellings

Where required, Unitywater's Customer Care Initiative will be initiated to facilitate works required to address internal surcharge damage.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibilities for the effective and efficient management of sewer blockages and sewage overflows are outlined below.

4.1 Network Operations Branch, Customer Delivery Business Unit

Network Operations Branch is responsible for:

- ensuring compliance with this policy when scheduling and dispatching jobs and when internally communicating information related to sewer blockage and sewage overflow notifications; and
- maintaining the overarching process (development and implementation of policy, procedures and related process documentation) and communicating any process changes to internal stakeholders.

4.2 Field Services & Support Branch, Customer Delivery Business Unit

The Field Services & Support Branch is responsible for in-field support (as needed) in validating private plumbers' identification fee claims.

4.3 Administration Services, People, Culture and Safety Business Unit

Nominated Administration Services team members are responsible for processing private plumbers' identification fee claims.

4.4 Customer Service Branch, Customer and Community Business Unit

The Customer Service Branch is responsible for ensuring that communications with the public and private plumbers in relation to sewer blockages and sewage overflows are in accordance with this policy.

4.5 Communications and Engagement Branch, Customer and Community Business Unit

The Communications and Engagement Branch is responsible for developing and implementing the communications plan associated with this policy and related procedures.

4.6 Revenue Assurance Branch, Customer and Community Business Unit

The Revenue Assurance Branch is responsible for invoicing the private property owner, identified by the Customer Service Branch, for any works conducted by Unitywater related to blockages within the private drain.

4.7 Accounts Payable, Corporate Strategy and Performance Business Unit

The Accounts Payable Section of the Corporate Strategy and Performance Business Unit is responsible for processing the invoice payment request raised by the Administration Services Team upon verification of the plumbers' reimbursement claims.

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5. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Blockage	An obstruction which can be located and removed and which is unlikely to disappear without carrying out the removal. For the avoidance of doubt, rain or stormwater runoff or other liquid (other than sewerage) which enters Unitywater's sewerage infrastructure and temporarily impacts the movement or flow of sewerage is not a 'blockage'.
Inspection Opening (IO) or Inspection Opening to Surface (IOS)	Fitting which allows Unitywater or a private plumber to view/inspect within the sewer jump up. Location at which property sanitary drains connect to the agency's sewer. Exists in addition to owner inspection opening which can be separate inspection shaft to surface or private drain jump up or boundary trap shaft.
Internal Surcharge	An Internal Surcharge is the discharge of sewage inside a dwelling through the following fixtures and situations when a blockage, blow back or wet weather infiltration is encountered.
Private drain	The sanitary drain which transports sewage from private homes/buildings to the sewerage network owned and operated by Unitywater commencing at the property Inspection Opening (IO) or Inspection Opening to Surface (IOS).
Private plumber	An experienced Plumbing Contractor who has obtained a plumbing licence from the Plumbing Industry Council and is not employed by or on behalf of Unitywater.
Private property owner	The organisation or person/s registered to be the owner of the connected premises. An owner is the registered proprietor of land under the provisions of the <i>Land Title Act 1994</i> ; the lessee or licensee of the land under the <i>Land Act 1994</i> ; a person who has lawful control of the land; or a person who is entitled to receive rents and profits from the land. Includes the occupier of the land, i.e. a person who is in charge of the land, but not a tenant occupier, e.g. an occupier of residential or commercial premises under a tenancy or similar agreement.
Private property	Real property that is held by an individual or entity as freehold or leasehold and is used for living purposes or for business where there are sewer connections for waste that is not trade waste (e.g. customer and team member toilets, showers).
Sewer jump up	The property connection which is a short sewer owned and operated by Unitywater and which connects the sewer main and the customer sanitary drain. It includes a junction on the sewer main, a property connection fitting, a vertical riser (in some cases) and sufficient straight pipes to ensure the property connection fitting is located within the lot to be serviced.
Sewer overflow	A sewer overflow is when sewage spills out onto private or public land / property and is a condition in which untreated sewage is discharged from a sanitary sewer into the environment prior to reaching sewage treatment facilities.