

The Facts About Sanitary Sewer Overflows

No one likes sanitary sewer overflows - especially Lexington Utilities Wastewater Division. Our employees work hard to prevent them, but heavy rains and flooding often cause overflows. The answers to the following questions may help you better understand overflows and how your utility operates:

What are sanitary sewer overflows?

Overflows can happen when wastewater escapes from manholes, lift stations or residential/industrial cleanout accesses before reaching the treatment plant. Most overflows are contained to the immediate area of the manhole or cleanout - unless they are carried by stormwater flooding.

Will reducing overflows help keep our creeks and lakes clean?

It will help, but water contamination comes from many sources. The EPA says stormwater runoff is the leading cause of water pollution in the U.S. It washes animal waste (from pets, livestock, wildlife), pesticides, fertilizer, oil, and other pollutants into creeks.

[See www.epa.gov/region4/water/nps/ for more information.]

What should I do if I see an overflow?

Avoid contact and call Lexington Utilities Wastewater Division at 968-5213 during normal business hours or the Lexington Police Department at night/weekends at 968-6666. If you can't avoid contact, wash exposed area thoroughly with soap and water.

Are sewer overflows health hazards?

Sewer overflows may expose you to bacteria or other pathogens that can cause disease. Overflows contain everything that goes down your drain, including water from washing machines, dishwashers, sinks, showers, and toilets. These sources originate from residential homes, medical facilities, commercial businesses and industrial facilities. Although the toilet water is diluted by the other water, we urge you to avoid contact. If you can't avoid contact, wash thoroughly with soap and water.

Skin contact doesn't pose a serious health risk, but there is some risk of disease from swallowing bacteria. So, we urge you to always wash your hands before preparing or eating food, after using the bathroom (or helping someone else use the bathroom, changing diapers, cleaning toilets, etc.), and after handling anything that had contact with floodwater or sewage.

How can I help?

Stopping overflows and cleaning up our creeks will take hard work from all of us. You can start by discarding cooking grease in your trash and not down your drain. For more information, see our **Can the Grease** section. We also offer tips to help you be part of the pollution solution at home, at work, and in the community.