Basement Flooding and Sewage Backup: What to Do and What Not to Touch

A guide for Alton and Metro East homeowners

GATEWAY WATER & MOLD

Basement Flooding and Sewage Backup: What to Do and What Not to Touch

Water in a basement is not all the same. Where it came from decides how it is cleaned up, what can be saved and whether it is safe to be near. This guide for Alton and Metro East homeowners covers the first steps, the difference between clean water and sewage, and what to expect from cleanup. It is general guidance. The right plan depends on what is found on site.

First: where is the water coming from?

A flooded basement usually traces back to one of a few sources, listed on Gateway's basement flooding page:

- A sump pump that failed or could not keep up
- Storm water coming in from outside
- Seepage through the foundation
- An appliance or supply line leak
- A sewer or drain backup

Note what you can see: where the water is entering, and whether it is clear, cloudy or carries an odor. The visible entry point does not always show the real cause, which is why the source is assessed before the cleanup plan is set.



Watch: My basement floor drain is backed up. What should I do? | St. Louis Water & Mold Answers

What to do right away

- Stay out of water that is near outlets, appliances or the electrical panel until power to that area is off
- If the source is a supply line, close the main shutoff
- If it may be sewage, keep people and pets out of the area
- Take photos before anything is moved
- Report a suspected public sewer problem to the responsible utility

What not to touch

Sewer water is classed as Category 3, which means contaminated. Gateway's sewage cleanup page is direct about it: do not try to clean it up yourself. It needs protective equipment, removal of saturated porous materials and controlled disposal.

Keep everyone out of the affected area until it has been cleaned and dried, especially children, older adults, pets and anyone with a weak immune system. Gateway's article on sewer backup cleanup safety explains more.



Watch: Is it safe to stay in a house with a sewage backup? | St. Louis Water & Mold Answers

What usually has to go after a sewage backup

- Saturated carpet and pad, which usually cannot be sanitized
- Soaked insulation and wet base trim
- Drywall, to a height set by the contamination and the moisture readings

Contents are inventoried. Items that can be saved are moved to a dry area, and items that cannot are photographed before disposal. That photo record matters for an insurance claim.



Watch: Can the smell of sewage be harmful? | St. Louis Water & Mold Answers

How cleanup and drying work

Cleanup starts with extraction, then removal of materials that cannot be saved, then cleaning suited to the contamination and the surfaces involved. After that, air movers and dehumidifiers dry the structure, and readings are taken daily until the affected materials are dry. How long that takes depends on the contamination, the materials and the conditions, so ask for an estimate specific to your basement.

Gateway's dispatch window for Alton is under 2 hours. See basement flooding cleanup in Alton, IL. The phone line is (314) 947-3419.

Common misconception: "It was only an inch of water, so it will dry on its own"

Depth is not the measure. Water wicks up into drywall, sits under flooring and soaks base trim and carpet pad, and those materials can stay wet long after the floor looks dry. Basement materials that stay wet for more than 24 to 48 hours are where mold concerns begin. And if the water came from a drain or sewer, the amount matters much less than what was in it.

If it keeps happening

A basement that takes water repeatedly has a source that needs its own fix. That may be the pump, the drainage outside, the foundation or the sewer connection. Some of those repairs belong to other trades. For example, a qualified plumber can say whether a backwater valve suits the property. Gateway does not install them.

If a pump was the cause, see Gateway's page on sump pump failure cleanup.



Watch: Can a basement that floods every time it rains be fixed? | St. Louis Water & Mold Answers

A note on insurance

Sewer and drain backups are often covered only when the policy has a specific endorsement. Check your policy for coverage, limits and exclusions. The insurer decides coverage. A restoration company documents the source and the contamination it observed.

Terms to know

- **Category 3 water:** contaminated water, such as sewage.
- **Porous materials:** carpet, pad, drywall and insulation, which absorb water and what it carries.
- **Backwater valve:** a plumbing device meant to stop sewer water flowing back into a home. Installed by a plumber.
- **Structural drying:** using air movers and dehumidifiers to dry building materials to a measured target.

More from Gateway Water & Mold

More short answers are on the Gateway Water & Mold YouTube channel. Service details for the area are on the Alton service area page.

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Water damage restoration and mold remediation

(314) 947-3419

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