

Responsibility Regarding Sewer Blockages and Failures

Introduction

In accordance with the *Water & Sewerage Industry Act 2008*, TasWater is responsible for the maintenance of sewer mains and branch lines to the customer's connection point. The property owner is responsible for all drains, fixtures and apparatus upstream of and including the first inspection opening (IO) or boundary trap (BT) or if no such device is fitted, then to the property owner's boundary (the private system).

The following information provides guidelines for plumbing contractors and property owners involved in the removal of a blockage in a TasWater or private system.

1. Customer's responsibility

If a customer identifies a sewage problem relating to their private system, then it is their responsibility to:

If IO is known and accessible

- If the IO is clear, then this indicates there is a blockage in the service connection on the private property and the IO may be used to provide access for a plumber to clear the blockage
- If sewage flows out of the IO, this indicates a blockage from outside the property boundary and TasWater should be called to attend.

If IO is unknown/inaccessible

- The property owner is responsible to locate the IO or engage a registered plumber/drainage contractor to install one. This may require contacting local councils to consult drainage plans. Property drainage plans are not kept or maintained by TasWater
- The first IO inside the property boundary shall be raised to ground surface level as an inspection shaft forming part of the private system achieving compliance with current standards. The owner is responsible for the cost of work performed on the private system and in all cases responsible for the cost of raising the first IO to the surface.

Upon installation of an IO, the process of determining the source of a problem is as detailed above.

TasWater may reimburse a plumber for costs incurred (to a maximum of 2 hours work) to ascertain that TasWater is responsible for the blockage. (NOTE: The costs incurred to locate the IO and/or install an IO shall be directed to the customer regardless of where the blockage lies).

2. Plumber's responsibility

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

- may inspect TasWater infrastructure using the IO for the purpose of ascertaining whether a blockage has occurred downstream of the IO (i.e. within the private property owners area of responsibility – private system)
- are not permitted to open or otherwise access TasWater infrastructure, such as manholes, without TasWater authorisation
- are prohibited from performing any construction or maintenance work, including the clearing of blockages on TasWater infrastructure, including the clearing of blockages located within TasWater sewer infrastructure without TasWater authorisation; and must contact TasWater on 13 6992 upon diagnosing a blockage within TasWater's infrastructure.

Clearing blockage (private system)

- In all cases involving hand or machine rodding the plumber must work from the downstream end of the line in an upstream direction and prevent the material causing the blockage entering the TasWater system.

If determined the blockage is in the TasWater system.

If it is agreed the blockage is in the TasWater system and TasWater authorises the work, the plumbers invoice must be sent to TasWater and be fully itemised to include:

- The TasWater contact person,
- Labour,
- Plant & material,
- Any fees payable.

If the property owner is responsible for some costs (such as locating the access point), separate invoices should be sent to the property owner as well as a copy to TasWater.

3. TasWater's responsibility

Upon contact from either a customer or a customer's plumber, TasWater staff will advise a course of action. Such action may include:

- Sending staff to the blockage to clear it, or
- Authorising the plumber to clear the blockage.

Note: If TasWater is required to clear blockages upstream of a customer's connection point, then TasWater may attempt to recover costs for this work from the property owner. If it is evident that a property owner has built over TasWater assets, including access points, then TasWater may attempt to recover costs for the reinstatement works from the property owner.