

Know Where Your Drains Go

Do you know where your drains go? If not, it's important to find out. Where a drain leads determines what may go down it. Putting the wrong materials down your drains violates the law and may harm the environment and human health. It could lead to costly clean-up, liability, and bad publicity, and it may cause your drains to back up and flood your property.

Identify where your drains lead

- Most outdoor drains, such as those in your parking lot, lead to the storm drainage system. Assume that any outdoor drain is a storm drain unless you can verify that it leads to the sewer, or a combined system that carries both sewage and stormwater run-off.
- Most indoor drains are connected to the sewer, or to a septic system in areas not serviced by the sewer. However, some indoor drains lead to a dead-end sump. Also, some old buildings may have illegal connections that discharge indoor wastewater to a storm drain.
- If you're not sure where your drains lead, check your building's "as-built" plans, if available, or call your local sewer or storm drainage agency for help.

Manage materials near your drain

- Maintain a dry floor and seal off drains where hazardous materials could spill.
- Clean up spills of waste with dry absorbent and place in sealed containers for hazardous disposal.
- Mop water from cleaning can usually go to the sanitary sewer. Check with your sewer authority.

Follow the restrictions for different drains

- The storm drainage system is meant to carry only uncontaminated stormwater run-off, since it conveys the water, without treatment, to surface water and groundwater. Oil, antifreeze, detergents, and other materials should not be discharged to a storm drain.
- The sanitary sewer system carries wastewater to a sewage treatment plant. It still matters what goes down the drain, since the treatment process isn't designed for all pollutants. Certain wastes are prohibited altogether. Check with your local sewer agency before discharging anything down a sanitary sewer other than domestic sewage (wastewater from restroom and kitchen plumbing).
- Septic systems provide on-site treatment and disposal of liquid wastes. Never put industrial wastewater or hazardous chemicals down a drain leading to a septic system.

Maintain the structures below your drains

- Most local drainage agencies have specific maintenance requirements for businesses with their jurisdiction.
- Sumps are holding tanks that provide a way to collect liquids, such as washwater or spilled materials. Sumps should not be connected to storm drains or septic systems or discharged to the ground. Sumps need to be pumped out and the contents disposed of periodically.
- Catch basins are located beneath many, but not all, storm drain gates. They are underground boxes designed to pass water through an outlet pipe while trapping sediment that settles to the bottom. The sediment in catch basins needs to be periodically cleaned out in order for the catch basin to function properly.
- Oil/water separators are structures designed to remove oil and sediment from water before the water is discharged to the storm drain or sewer system. Keep the oil/water separator working properly by never dumping waste materials into it. Check the separator regularly to determine a clean-out schedule, and have the unit pumped out when the sludge is six inches deep in the first compartment or if floating oil is in the outlet chamber.
- Detention facilities are structures that temporarily store stormwater run-off and release it at a controlled rate to reduce the chance of flooding and stream-bank erosion. Detention systems need to be cleaned periodically.

Who to call

For additional information about what can be discharged to the sanitary sewer, contact your local sewer agency. For storm drainage information contact Clark County Environmental Services.