

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Residential Footing Drain Disconnection

August 30, 2018

Q1. Why did I receive a flyer in the mail on this topic?

Answer: The City is in the early stages of implementing a footing drain disconnection program. The first step in this program is informing residents about illegal drain connections to the City's sanitary sewer system. The flyer included information on how to determine if a resident might have an illegal connection, the impacts and risks associated with illegal connections and steps to take to eliminate an illegal connection.

Q2. What is an illegal connection?

Answer: Grandville Code of Ordinances Sec. 26-105(b)19 prohibits discharge to the sanitary sewer system of "any stormwater, surface water, groundwater, roof runoff or other unpolluted drainage". Illegal residential connections to the sanitary sewer system may be through sump pumps and/or home foundation footing drains.

Q3. What are the impacts of illegal connections to the sanitary sewer system?

Answer: Clear water sources take capacity away from and place stress on the sanitary sewer collection system. They can cause full pipes, excessive pumping and avoidable cost for the electricity and chemicals used to treat unpolluted water. Ultimately, these increase your bill as a utility rate payer.

Q4. What are the potential impacts of illegal connections to my property?

Answer: The primary danger is the potential for a damaging and expensive sewer backup to occur in your home. Excessive clear water entering the sanitary system collection system from other illegal connections in your neighborhood can overload the pipes and result in sewer backups through floor drains or fixtures, even if you do **not** have an illegal connection. If your home has an illegally connected sump pump, it may not be able to pump out against the high pressure of a sanitary sewer collection system strained beyond capacity with excessive clear water.

Q5. If I haven't had a previous flooding or sewer backup issue, do I need to be concerned?

Answer: Yes. If you have an illegal connection, you may still be contributing clean water to the sanitary system, which can cause problems downstream for your neighbors. All clear water sources should be disconnected to prevent issues with the system.

Q6. How do I know if I have an illegal connection?

Illegal sump pump connections: An internal sump pump that connects to the sanitary sewer line instead of pumping to the exterior of the house into the lawn, drainage area, or storm drain is illegal. In most cases, this is a visible connection in the basement of the home. If you have a sump pump but are uncertain where that pump discharges, you may request a City representative to provide an inspection of your connection. To request an inspection, see the contact information provided at the end of this document.



Sump Pump (certifiedplumbingmi.com)

Illegal footing drain connections: Footing drains connected to the sanitary sewer system rather than outletting to a legal sump pump discharge or to a storm sewer are illegal. These drains are external to the home and typically buried near the home's foundation. They are sometimes connected to an internal sump pump or may be connected to the sanitary sewer lateral line outside of the home. Footing drains are not visible from within the house, however a licensed plumber can quickly run a scoping camera down the lateral to determine if there is a connection between the sanitary sewer line and the footing drains. The City is not equipped to perform this inspection.

Q7. Does the City have records of footing drain connections for individual homes?

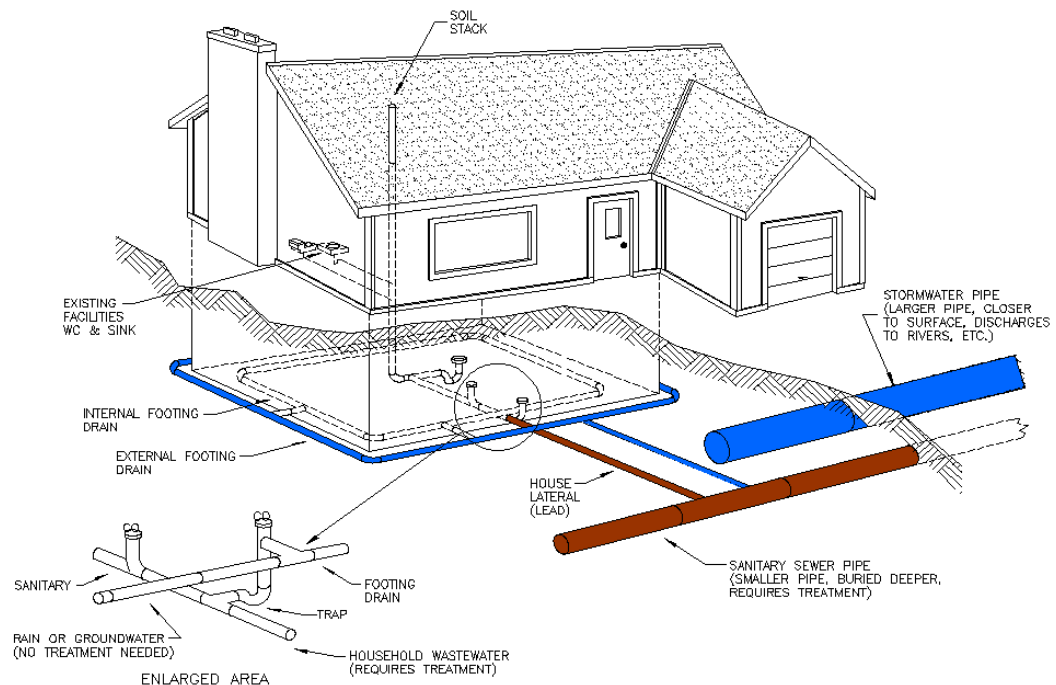


Image from "www.middleoftheleft.com"

Answer: No, building plans for single family residences typically do not show footing drain connections. In homes built in Grandville since approximately the 1980's, the outlet is verified in the field by a building inspector at the time of initial construction of the home and no certificate of occupancy is issued if the connection is to the sanitary sewer system. Subsequent modifications by the homeowner are unknown to the City. If your house was constructed since the 1980's and if there have been no subsequent modifications, it is likely that your home would be compliant. Verification by a licensed plumber would confirm this.

Q8. What if I DON'T have an illegal connection?

Answer: If you can determine that there is no illegal connection either inside or external to the house, then no further action is necessary. **Please report this finding to the City for documentation** using the contact information provided at the end of this document.

Q9. What if I DO have an illegal connection?

Answer: The illegal connection must be corrected by a licensed plumber (a plumbing permit is not required for disconnecting an illegal sump pump or footing drain connection). Once this is complete, please contact the City (contact info at end of document) for a post-repair inspection.

Q10. If I DO have an illegal connection, do I have to make this repair now?

Answer: Completing a repair now reduces unnecessary flow to the sanitary sewer system and reduces the chances of a damaging sewer backup to you and/or your neighbors, however, the City will be addressing this issue with homeowners in the City over an extended period of time and focusing on priority neighborhoods first. There is not currently a fixed deadline for compliance but, at some point, homeowners with illegal connections will be required to eliminate those connections. Any remaining uncorrected illegal connections at that time could result in further action to enforce compliance or in a sewer surcharge on your utility bill.

Q11. Where are the "priority" neighborhoods?

Answer: The initial priority neighborhood is shown on the map below. This area has been identified due to evidence of excessive clean water flow in the sanitary sewer system and/or previous incidents of sewer backup resulting from excessive clean water flows. Other priority neighborhoods will be determined as the program continues.

Q12. Will someone inspect my home to determine if there is an illegal connection?

Answer: No inspector will enter any home without homeowner permission. If you would like a DPW staff member to inspect your home to determine if there is a sump pump connection to the sanitary sewer system, please contact the City (contact info at end of document). The City is not currently equipped to do a footing drain inspection but, as stated above, homeowners can engage a licensed plumber to run a scoping camera down the lateral to determine if there is a connection between footing drains and the sanitary sewer line.

Q13. How is this being documented?

Answer: The Grandville Department of Public Works will maintain a record of inspected and verified homes that are either connected or disconnected.

Q14. Am I responsible for the costs, or is the City?

Answer: There are no public dollars available for correcting illegal connections to the sanitary sewer system on private property so the homeowner is responsible for the cost of hiring a plumber and for elimination of any illegal connections, although the City will make a free sump pump inspection upon request (see Q10).

Q15. What is the City doing to address this situation?

Answer: To date, the City has spent over \$1 million on remotely televising and inspecting the public portions of the collection system, flow investigations, asset management planning and sewer lining projects to prevent ground water in-flow where it has been identified. Overall findings indicate that a majority of the issues are stemming from inflow and infiltration of unpolluted stormwater. The City, via the flyer mailed to residents in August, this FAQ sheet and future neighborhood meetings, is also educating residents on the need to eliminate illegal connections and the risks if they fail to do so.

Q16. When will more information be available?

Answer: Public information meetings will be held starting in late 2018 in priority neighborhoods. Regardless of whether or not you live in a priority neighborhood, you may speak directly with a City representative about this issue using the contact info at the end of this document.

Some specific homeowner scenarios:

Q17. If I don't have a basement, do I need to do anything?

Answer: There is a high probability that there is no illegal connection if no basement is present, although there may still be footing drains around the foundation that could be connected. Inspection by a licensed plumber would confirm or rule out an illegal connection.

Q 18. I have a visible floor drain in my basement but no sump pump. Am I in compliance?

Answer: Floor drains are typically connected to the sanitary system. This is permitted and no disconnection is necessary. Be aware, however, that other illegal connections at your

home or at neighboring homes increase the chances of basement sewer backups for everyone in the neighborhood and a floor drain is one of the pipes that could backup. You may want to consult a plumber about the possibility of a check valve on this line, if one is not already present. Be aware, check valves require regular monitoring to be sure they are functioning properly.

Q19. I have a visible sump pump and it discharges the water through my basement wall onto my yard (or into a ditch or creek). Am I in compliance?

Answer: Yes, a sump pump that discharges unpolluted water to the exterior of the house onto the lawn or into a drainage area or storm drain is permitted. Only sump pumps that discharge to the sanitary sewer line are illegal.

Q20: I know that I do not have a sump pump but I don't know if I have a footing drain system. What action do I need to take?

Answer: See Q6. Since footing drains are not visible from within the house, you will need to contract a licensed plumber to run a scoping camera down the sewer lateral to determine if there is a connection between the sanitary sewer line and a footing drain system for your home.

Q21. I used to have a sump pump, but it was disconnected when my home was hooked up to city sewer. Do I need to have my home inspected for an illegal connection?

Answer: Yes, a disconnected septic system is not evidence that no illegal connection to the sanitary sewer system exists. It is possible the sump pump discharge was rerouted to the sanitary sewer at the time your home was connected for sewer service. You may still have an illegal connection from a rerouted sump pump or footing drain discharge.

Q22. What if I'm disconnected, but my neighbors are connected?

Answer: See Q4. All connections can contribute to problems in the system, and can affect your house, even if you are not connected illegally. There is also an impact on everyone's utility rates to treat clean water.

Q23. If I have a newer home, am I in compliance?

Answer: It is more likely that newer homes are in compliance, but not certain. Homes built in Grandville since approximately the 1980's were verified at the time of initial construction to not be connected illegally to the sanitary sewer system, however, subsequent modifications by homeowners are unknown to the City. Again, the City can perform a sump pump inspection upon request (contact information below) but inspection by a licensed plumber is necessary to determine if any footing drains are connected illegally to the sanitary sewer system.

Q24. My water meter is getting replaced? Does this mean I'm in compliance?

Answer: No. The water meter replacement is a separate program. During the meter replacement, however, the installer will check to see if there are any illegal sump pump connections, if the pipes are visible. The installer is not equipped to check for illegal footing drain connections.

City of Grandville Contact Information:

For more information on this topic, please call the Grandville Department of Public Works at 538-1990 or email the City at connect@cityofgrandville.com using the subject “Residential Drain Disconnection”