

## Questions and Answers About Water and Sewer Pipes and Plumbing Systems

### Which pipes does OWASA own?

OWASA owns and maintains the public water and sewer pipes and meters in street rights-of-way and easements, including the small pipe from the OWASA "water main" to OWASA's meter at or near the boundary of a customer's property.

### Which pipes are privately owned?

The pipe carrying water from our meter to a house or other building is privately owned. The nut or other fitting which connects the private pipe to the water meter is also privately owned and maintained.

The sewer service pipe or "lateral" carrying wastewater from a building to an OWASA sewer is privately owned.

In many locations, part of the private sewer service pipe is in a public street right-of-way. A street right-of-way normally includes several feet on each side of the roadway.

In some situations, after the property owner arranges a video inspection of the service line by a plumber, OWASA may repair damage to the part of a sewer service pipe in a public street right of way. However, OWASA does not clean or remove roots, grease or debris from private sewer lines whether inside or outside of a right-of-way or sewer easement. For more information on when we may repair the part of a sewer service pipe in a street right-of-way, please contact us or visit our website.

### Does OWASA repair privately-owned pipes or other items in private plumbing systems?

As a public agency, OWASA owns and maintains public facilities and does not repair private systems (with the limited exception for the part of private sewer service pipes in public street rights-of-way).

### Does OWASA evaluate or endorse companies that provide plumbing installation, maintenance or repair services?

We know that our customers receive offers from private companies regarding repair service agreements and we receive inquiries about these offers.

Some of the companies offer "insurance" programs involving repairs to privately-owned water or sewer service pipes when needed in return for payment of monthly fees.

We do not evaluate these companies or their offers, but we encourage our customers to understand the scope, benefits and costs of these service arrangements just as a customer would in considering whether to buy an extended warranty or non-utility service contract.



**Thermal expansion.** Water expands when heated (for example, due to normal operation of a water heater). Thermal expansion increases the pressure in a plumbing system unless there is a device to relieve pressure. High pressure may cause excessive opening of the pressure relief valve on a water heater or leaks at faucets, spigots, pipes, fixtures and hoses. To address thermal expansion, you can install a toilet fill valve with a pressure relief valve, or a device called an expansion tank. We recommend getting advice from a licensed plumber or other qualified person about whether to install a device in your plumbing system to handle the expansion of heated water.



### CONTACT US

**Orange Water and Sewer Authority**  
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Carrboro, NC 27510

**Customer Service phone and e-mail:**  
919.537.4343  
customerservice3@owasa.org

**Office Hours:**  
8 AM to 5 PM, Monday-Friday

**Emergencies and Main Office phone:**  
919.968.4421  
[www.owasa.org](http://www.owasa.org); [info@owasa.org](mailto:info@owasa.org)

## Q&A... *(continued from front)*

### Should I have insurance for damage from wastewater back-ups and water pipe failures?

We encourage customers to check whether their insurance covers damage from water pipe failures and wastewater back-ups. Customers without this coverage may wish to get advice from their insurance agents about the cost and benefits of this coverage.

### What should go down the drain or be flushed down a toilet?

Our wastewater system is designed to collect and treat body waste and toilet paper; water used in showering and bathing, washing clothes and dishes, cleaning with normal strength cleaners and food preparation; and other normal business and residential purposes.

Some of the items which should not be flushed or put down a drain are:

- fat, oil and grease;
- chemicals such as solvents, fuel and paint;
- solid waste such as personal hygiene wipes, paper towels and office paper; and
- medication

For more information on whether items should go into a public sewer, be recycled, disposed of with trash or taken to the **County's Household Hazardous Waste Program**, please contact **OWASA Public Affairs** at **919-537-4267** or **info@owasa.org**, or visit **www.owasa.org** and do a search for "drain."

### How should I dispose of fat, oil, grease and unused medication?

Residential customers should dispose of fat and grease with trash (rather than down a drain leading to a sewer). Cooking oil should be recycled at **Orange County's Household Hazardous Waste Program** on Eubanks Road north of Chapel Hill. If improperly disposed of, fat, oil and grease can cause back-ups in private plumbing drains or block a public sewer, resulting in a wastewater overflow.

Businesses with waste fat, oil and grease are required to have grease traps which are regularly cleaned out by a recycling company.

Unused medication can be disposed of in the "drop box" programs at the **Chapel Hill** and **Carrboro Police Departments** (weekdays 8:30 AM to 5 PM in Carrboro and 9 AM to 5 PM in Chapel Hill). The Police Headquarters in Chapel Hill are at 828 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and in Carrboro they are in the Century Center at the intersection of Main and Greensboro Streets.

### Should I have a water shut-off valve in my plumbing system?

Yes. With a shut-off valve, you can turn water off quickly and easily to stop a leak in a pipe or fixture; and turn water off during a repair, installation of a faucet, dishwasher, etc.

We recommend marking the location of the shut-off with a tag or sign so that family members, repair people, etc. can find it easily.



**Shut-off valves** are often installed in a closet or in the crawlspace at the front side of a house or other building.

## For more information

Please contact **Public Affairs** at **919.537.4267** or **info@owasa.org** and visit our website for information about protecting sewers and plumbing items including pressure reducing valves, P-traps, etc.

**Español**

Este boletín informativo contiene información sobre los servicios de agua y alcantarillado de **OWASA**. Para obtener una traducción, por favor llame al **919.537.4221** o mande un correo electrónico a: **info@owasa.org**. ¡Muchas gracias!