

# Troubleshooting

**There may a simple answer to your sewer-related problem.**

**Check out the tips below if you have...**

- An alarm going off
- A sewer odor
- A sewer back-up

## **Remember:**

When troubleshooting and making repairs, always wear appropriate personal protective gear such as safety glasses, rubber gloves, etc. **Call Olson's for a complete solution!**

## **ALARMS**

### **Lift Station Alarm for Outside Tank**

The alarm sounds to alert you to a problem in the lift station tank:

1) There is no power to the lift station tank:

- Check the circuit breaker for the pump - the alarm and pump should be on separate breakers. If the breaker for the pump is not engaged, re-set the breaker.
- If the breaker repeatedly disengages, the pump may be jammed, have a worn base plate, or be in failure. *Call Olson's!*

2) The float switch for the pump is not functioning or the pump is not working:

The float switch activates the pump; if it is not functioning the liquid will collect in the tank to a level that will activate the alarm float switch and sound the alarm.

- Generally, the pump can be plugged directly into a power source, by-passing the switch. However, you are now operating the pump manually and you must unplug the pump to shut it off or the pump may burn out.
- If the pump does not turn on when by-passing the switch and there is power to pump, the pump may be jammed, have a worn base plate, or be in failure. In either case, the problem will need to be corrected. *Call Olson's!*

***PLEASE NOTE: If you are able to resume function of the lift station do not pump out a large amount of effluent in a single dose to the treatment area as this could damage the treatment area. Your system is designed to receive short cycles of dosing distribution. Refer to your original design documents for gallons per cycle information.***

3) If the system is time-dosed, there may be excess water use prior to the timer engaging the pump to discharge effluent to the treatment area.

- Stop using water for a short period of time to allow the time-dosing to "catch-up" to the use rate of water.
- If the alarm does not stop alerting, you may check steps 1 and 2 above.
- If the alarm stops alerting, but you experience this problem frequently, adjustments in household water use habits may need to be adjusted. Call Olson's for more information on water management and time-dose systems.

### **Sewage Ejector or Sump Pump Alarm**

1) There is no power to the pump:

Check the circuit breaker for the pump-the alarm and pump should be on separate breakers.

- If the breaker for the pump is not engaged, re-set the breaker.
- If the breaker repeatedly disengages, the pump may be jammed or be in failure. *Call Olson's!*

2) The float switch for the pump is not functioning or the pump is not working:

The float switch activates the pump; if it is not functioning the liquid will collect in the tank to a level that will activate the alarm float switch and sound the alarm.

- Generally, the pump can be plugged in directly to a power source, by-passing the switch. However, you are now operating the pump manually and you must unplug the pump to shut it off or the pump may burn out.
- If the pump does not turn on when by-passing the switch and there is power to pump, the pump may be jammed or be in failure. In either case, the problem will need to be corrected. *Call Olson's!*  
Sewage ejector pumps generally, by code, discharge wastewater only from the lower level of the home.
- If the water generated in the upper level of your home gravity flows out of the house, you can continue to use the upper level facilities until the lower level sewage ejector pump or pump switch repair is completed.  
Sump pumps generally discharge drain-tile water, laundry water, or water softener water, but not domestic wastewater. Review the purpose of your sump pump so that you can adjust water or appliance use accordingly until a repair is complete.

### **Constant Chirping on Alarm**

If the alarm box is sending a constant chirping sound rather than the alerting horn-like sound that occurs when you activate the TEST button, replace the 9 volt back-up battery in the alarm box. If that does not correct the problem, follow steps one and two above or *Call Olson's!*

## **ODORS**

**IF YOU HAVE A NATURAL GAS ODOR, IMMEDIATELY EVACUATE BUILDING, CONTACT 911 and THEN YOUR NATURAL GAS PROVIDER BY PHONE OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING. DO NOT USE THE BUILDING PHONE TO CALL 911 OR THE GAS PROVIDER.**

### **Sewer Gas Odor in Basement**

Sewer gas odor generally comes from floor drains or shower drains where the trap inside the drain piping is dry, void of water, allowing sewer gas to escape into the room. This often occurs at the start of the cold weather season when furnaces are running and removing humidity from the utility room where the furnaces operates. If a lower level shower is used infrequently, sewer gas odor may escape from the dry trap in the drain.

- Do not add chemicals, perfumes, or bleach to the drain lines.
- If pouring a few gallons of water down the drain doesn't remedy the problem, you may have a venting

problem that should be addressed by a plumber.

- If the odor accompanies a sewer back-up, Call *Olson's!*

### **Sewer Gas Odor in Bathroom**

A sewer gas odor in the bathroom may come from a few sources.

- If it's a dry trap in the tub or shower drain, it can be corrected by pouring a couple gallons of water down the drain.
- If the odor is coming from around the toilet base, the wax ring used to seal the connection of the toilet to the discharge pipe may have shrunk or pulled away from the pipe. The toilet will need to be removed and the wax ring replaced.
- If the odor does not seem to come from a drain or toilet area, you may have a plugged roof vent that will need to be cleared.

### **Sewer Odor When Enters Home**

Sewer gas escapes through vents on the roof by design. Occasionally, the gas will travel to the area under the eaves of the building and is pulled inside when the door of the building opened. A charcoal filter can be added to the roof vent to filter the sewer gas as it leaves the home through the roof vent.

### **Sewer Odor in Drinking Water**

If your water supply has a foul odor, generally this is due to hydrogen sulfide or sulfur bacteria, not sewage.

- Your well or pressure tank may need to be treated or you may need to add a water filtering system.
- Contact a well service provider or water specialist. Your county extension office may also have answers for resolving this problem.

## **SEWAGE & WATER BACK-UPS**

### **Sewage Ejector Pump or Sump Pump Backed-up**

Back-ups occurring in a pump basket area are usually caused by a failure of the pump to discharge wastewater or water out of the sump, basin, or crock. Follow these steps to troubleshoot the problem:

1) There is no power to the pump:

Check the circuit breaker for the pump-the alarm and pump should be on separate breakers.

- If the breaker for the pump is not engaged, re-set the breaker.
- If the breaker repeatedly disengages, the pump may be jammed or be in failure. Call *Olson's!*

2) The float switch for the pump is not functioning or the pump is not working:

The float switch activates the pump; if it is not functioning the liquid will collect in the tank to a level that will activate the alarm float switch and sound the alarm.

- Generally, the pump can be plugged in directly to a power source, by-passing the switch. However, you are now operating the pump manually and you must unplug the pump to shut it off or the pump may burn out.
- If the pump does not turn on when by-passing the switch and there is power to pump, the pump may be jammed or be in failure. In either case, the problem will need to be corrected. *Call Olson's!*

Sewage ejector pumps generally, by code, discharge wastewater only from the lower level of the home.

- If the water generated in the upper level of your home gravity flows out of the house, you can continue to use

the upper level facilities until the lower level sewage ejector pump or pump switch repair is completed. Sump pumps generally discharge drain-tile water, laundry water, or water softener water, but not domestic wastewater. Review the purpose of your sump pump so that you can adjust water or appliance use accordingly until a repair is complete.

If the back-up is not related to a power, switch, or pump failure, the problem is most likely an obstructed discharge line or overfull septic tank. *Call Olson's!*

### **Backed-up Sewer Line-Plugged Baffle**

If your home utilizes an onsite sewage treatment system and you have a sewer back-up in the home it is possible that the inlet baffle on your septic tank is plugged. Sometimes the inlet baffle can be cleared by dislodging the blockage with an extended, sturdy, device such as a shovel or broom handle. You can access the inlet baffle through the 4 to 6-inch inspection pipe or the 24-inch maintenance cover-DO NOT ENTER THE TANK. If a blocked baffle is the cause of the back-up and can be cleared the solution may only be temporary if the septic tank has a lot of solids, tissue, etc. that is plugging up the baffle or the baffle is the cause of obstruction and needs repair. *Call Olson's!*

If the sewer line backs-up after the baffle is checked and cleared if obstructed, the main line likely needs to be rotoed to clear the line and restore flow. *Call Olson's!*

### **Laundry Line Backs Up**

If you have a back-up when doing laundry, shut off the washing machine.

- If the back-up only occurs when the washing machine is discharging and other water-using appliances do not cause a back-up when used, the blockage is limited to the laundry line. In this case, you can continue to use the balance of the household water-using devices until the laundry line can be cleared.
- If your water softener discharges into the same line, shut the softener off until the line is cleared.
- Do not add chemical line cleaners, the line needs to be rotoed. *Call Olson's!*

### **Backed up Tub, Bathroom Sink, Kitchen Sink**

If your bathtub, bathroom sink, or kitchen sink is plugged, you can try to clear the line by plunging the line, or clearing the drain of any hair or debris.

- Use a combination of vinegar and baking soda to help clear a sluggish drain. If there is no standing water in the way:
  1. Pour a half-cup of baking soda down the drain, then add a half a cup of white vinegar.
  2. Place a drain cover over the drain and wait for fifteen to twenty minutes.
  3. Run hot water or pour the boiling water down the drain to flush the vinegar and baking soda through. The combination of vinegar and baking soda breaks down the soap residue, scum and other acids.
- DO NOT use chemical drain cleaners to clear your drain lines.

### **Sewer or Water Back-up After Home Not In Use in Winter**

If you arrive home from a winter vacation and find a slight water back-up in the lower level or have an immediate back-up from water use, you most likely have a frozen line due to the condensate from the high-efficiency furnace slowing discharging into the drain line. The line can be opened with a hot water pressure jetter. This can be prevented by having someone come into your home and periodically running water through the piping while you

are on vacation or by installing a collection unit and pump to capture the condensate. *Call Olson's!*

### **Mobile Homes or Exterior Wall Lines are Frozen**

If you have a mobile home make sure the piping under the home is protected from freezing with heat tape.

- Check the heat tape function every fall to make sure it is heating.
- If you have a water service line or drain line that runs on an exterior wall and the line freezes, try opening any cabinet doors that may be in front of the lines so heat from the building can get to the pipes.
- If the line does not thaw out with heat from the building, *Call Olson's!*

## **OTHER**

### **Sewage Surfacing On the Ground**

If you see sewage surfacing on the ground you may have a

- Broken sewer line
- Failed pump in a lift station
- An overfull septic tank

Make sure the electrical components of the system are working.

- Discontinue water use until the source of the problem can be identified. *Call Olson's!*

### **My Tank is Full and It Was Just Cleaned!**

A septic tank will "fill up" with wastewater discharged from the home typically within 5 to 25 days depending on the number of people in the home and the water use habits of the family. The inlet of the tank and the outlet of the tank are nearly the same elevation. When the liquid level reaches the outlet elevation, liquid will then flow to the next septic tank, or lift station tank, or to the treatment area, depending on the type of system. The tank will not "fill up" with accumulated solids to a point where the tank needs to be maintained for two to three years in most cases.

### **Water Pressure is Low**

If the problem is limited to a single fixture:

- Remove and rinse off or replace clogged or corroded screens and parts on an in-line part such as a faucet aerator or showerhead.
- If the problem is inadequate flow to the entire house, you may have a well issue and should contact a well pump maintenance provider.
- If you have municipal water service there may be a problem at the curb stop or meter and you may want to contact your municipality.
- If there is a visible leak in the yard, call Olson's as you may have a broken service line.

If you need a referral for a well service provider or plumber, *Call Olson's!*