

# A GUIDE TO YOUR SEWER SYSTEM

*Learn what happens to the water  
from your sink, shower, washing  
machine, dishwasher and toilet*



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
SANITATION DISTRICTS**  
*Converting Waste Into Resources*

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SEWER SYSTEM

Do you know where the water from your sink, shower, washing machine, dishwasher, and toilet goes after disappearing down the drain? This water (known as sewage or wastewater) travels through an extensive system of underground pipes to a treatment plant for cleaning. This remarkable piping system is known as the sewer system.

In Los Angeles County, the sewer system consists of 17,000 miles of underground pipes. That's the same length as three trips from LAX to Hawaii and back! Good sewage management is essential to protecting public health and the environment. The development of modern sewer systems and treatment plants is considered one of the most significant improvements to human life expectancy.



*Inside a large diameter sewer*

Typically, sewage moves from small pipes (4 to 6 inches in diameter) in homes and businesses to larger pipes in the nearby street (typically

8 inches in diameter or more) to bigger regional pipes (up to 100 inches in diameter or greater) that connect to treatment plants and may serve hundreds of thousands of people. The responsibility for maintaining the system changes as the sewage moves from the smaller pipes to the bigger pipes. See the inside of this brochure for more information.



*Sewage overflowing a manhole cover*



*CCTV Tractor with camera used to inspect sewers*



*Maintenance personnel at work*

## SEWAGE OVERFLOWS

The sewer system is designed, monitored and maintained to prevent the discharge of sewage into the environment. However, sewage overflows may occur due to pipe blockages or damage to the system. Because a sewage overflow creates public health and environmental concerns, it is very important that if you see or suspect a sewage overflow, you avoid contact with the sewage and use the information on the inside of this brochure to immediately notify the proper authority.

# WHO OWNS YOUR SEWER SYSTEM

## AND WHO DO YOU CONTACT IN THE EVENT OF AN OVERFLOW?

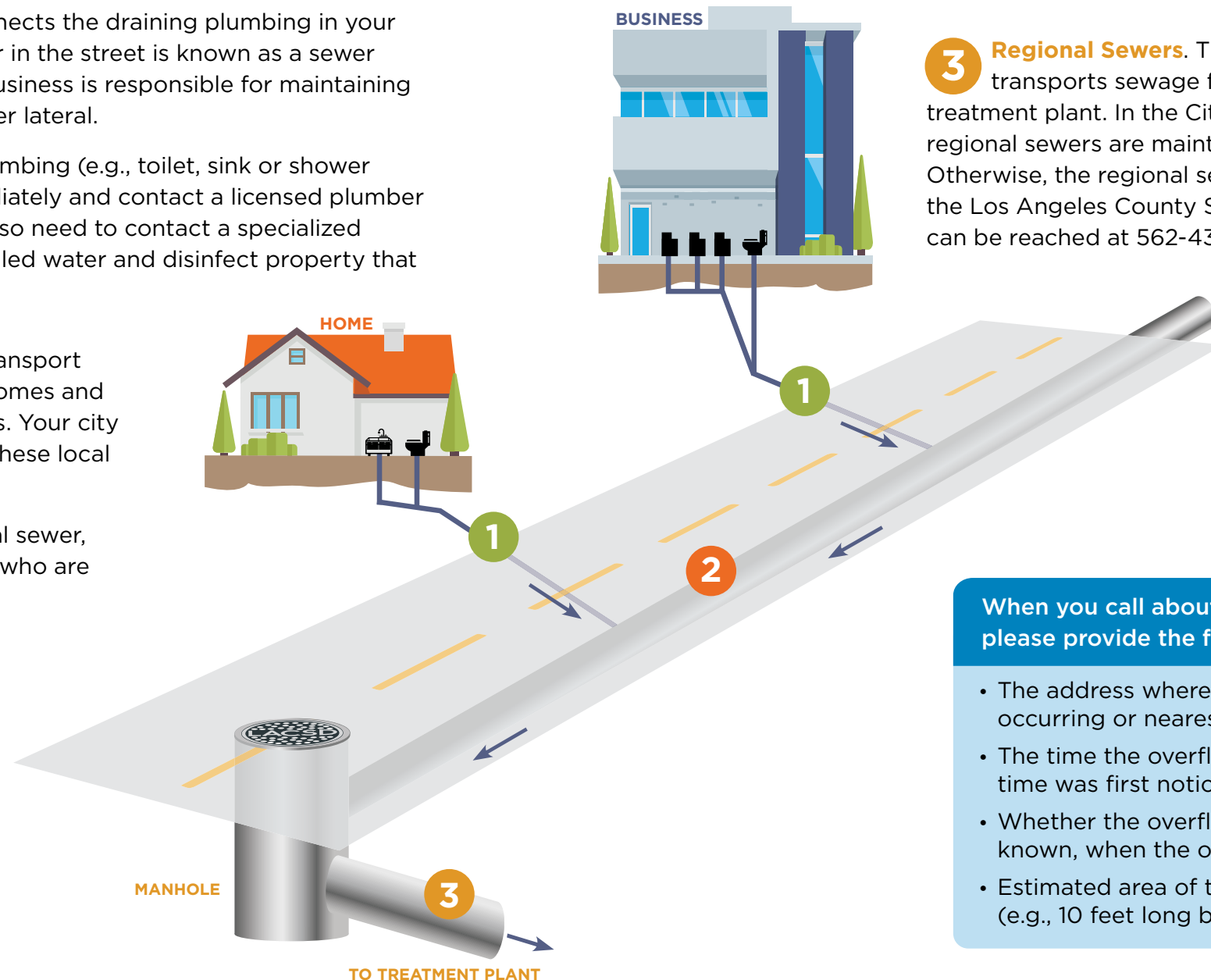
**1 Your Pipes.** The pipe that connects the draining plumbing in your home or business to the sewer in the street is known as a sewer lateral. The owner of the home or business is responsible for maintaining the drainage plumbing and the sewer lateral.

If there is an overflow from your plumbing (e.g., toilet, sink or shower drain), stop using your water immediately and contact a licensed plumber (or the property owner). You may also need to contact a specialized clean-up service to help remove spilled water and disinfect property that came in contact with spilled water.

**2 Local Sewers.** Local sewers transport sewage from neighborhood homes and businesses to larger, regional sewers. Your city (or other public agency) maintains these local sewers.

If you suspect a problem with a local sewer, please contact one of the following who are available 24/7:

- *City of Los Angeles: 213-485-7575*  
(LA Sanitation)
- *Other cities in LA County:*  
see [www.lacsd.org/overflow](http://www.lacsd.org/overflow)  
for contact information
- *Unincorporated LA County:*  
626-458-4357  
(LA County Public Works)



**3 Regional Sewers.** The regional sewer system transports sewage from local sewers to a treatment plant. In the City of Los Angeles, these regional sewers are maintained by LA Sanitation. Otherwise, the regional sewers are maintained by the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts who can be reached at 562-437-6520 (24/7).

**When you call about a sewer overflow, please provide the following information:**

- The address where the overflow is occurring or nearest cross streets.
- The time the overflow started or the time was first noticed.
- Whether the overflow is ongoing or, if known, when the overflow stopped.
- Estimated area of the overflow (e.g., 10 feet long by 3 feet wide).

## **TAKE ACTION TO KEEP YOUR SEWERS CLEAN AND PREVENT OVERFLOWS**

You are responsible for keeping the sewer pipes of your residence clear of clogs and blockages. Below are actions that you can take to prevent blockages and protect against expensive cleanup and repairs.

**ROOTS** cause 80% of sewage overflows. They intrude into sewer pipes through cracked or separated joints and then clog or rupture the pipe.

### **✓ WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

1. Do not plant trees or shrubs near your sewer pipes.
2. When replacing sewer pipes, consider installing Schedule 40 ABS and PVC pipes, which are more resistant to root intrusion.
3. Use commercially available products to remove and prevent re-growth of roots. Avoid products containing copper sulfate and sodium hydroxide. These are not as effective.

**FATS, OILS, AND GREASE (FOG)** can solidify in sewer pipes and create blockages.

**✓ WHAT CAN YOU DO?** Do not pour waste oil and cooking residue directly into your drain. Instead, place these items into a covered container and dispose in the trash.

**WIPES** do not break down in the sewer system, not even those that are marked “flushable.” As a result, they can accumulate and cause blockages.

**✓ WHAT CAN YOU DO?** Place all wipes into the trash. Never flush them down the toilet or any other drain.

DOC 6588072 rev 6/22

**For more information about the Sanitation Districts, please visit [www.lacsd.org](http://www.lacsd.org), or contact us at [info@lacsd.org](mailto:info@lacsd.org) or 562-908-4289, ext. 2301**