

Houston Sanitary Sewer Initiative: A Property Owner's Guide

**Understanding Houston's Consent Decree,
Compliance Requirements,
and Private Property Responsibilities**



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“Why You’re Receiving This Notice”

The City of Houston is carrying out one of the largest infrastructure compliance programs in its history. If you live in Houston or own commercial property, you may receive a letter from Houston Public Works (HPW) about your sanitary sewer line. These letters are part of a citywide initiative to reduce Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs). This guide explains what the program means, why it’s happening, and what your responsibilities are as a property owner.

The Consent Decree: Who Mandated This and Why

Houston is under a federal Consent Decree signed in 2021 with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

The Decree was put in place because Houston’s sanitary sewer system has experienced repeated SSOs, where untreated sewage escapes into streets, parking lots, and bayous. These events pose health risks and violate the federal Clean Water Act. The City must comply over a 15-year period, with a final deadline of 2036.

City vs. Property Owner Responsibilities

The City of Houston is responsible for maintaining and repairing public sewer mains and infrastructure located in the public right-of-way. Property owners—both residential and commercial—are responsible for the private service lines (laterals) that connect their building or facility to the City’s main.

If your cleanout is dry during a backup, the issue is on your private line. If it is full, it may be a City issue, and you should call 311.

The City’s Perspective

This program is estimated to cost at least \$2 billion over 15 years. Funding comes from utility rates paid by residents and businesses, as well as Houston’s Capital Improvement Program. The City must report annually to the EPA, TCEQ, and DOJ.

If the City fails to comply, it could face multimillion-dollar fines, stricter oversight, or even federal court action. Oversight of the program is led by Houston Public Works Wastewater Operations, under the leadership of the Director, with support from the Deputy Director of Wastewater Operations.

What Property Owners Can Expect

If HPW's inspections or smoke testing identify a problem on your property's lateral, you will receive a letter. The letter explains:

- What was found (e.g., cracks, open cleanouts, or improper connections).
- What you must do (repair the line, seal the defect, or hire a licensed plumber).
- How long you have (typically 30–60 days).

If you ignore the notice, penalties may include daily fines, cost recovery if the City intervenes, or even suspension of water/sewer service.

Language Access & Equity

Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the City is required to provide 'meaningful access' to non-English speakers. This means property owners have the right to request translated notices or interpretation services.

If you need help in another language, call 311 and ask for assistance. Spanish versions of notices are available, and other languages can be requested. Community groups like Bayou City Waterkeeper may also provide support.

Repair Options

Property owners have several options to repair defective laterals:

- Traditional dig-and-replace – costly and disruptive but sometimes necessary for collapsed pipes.
- Pipe lining (CIPP) – installs a resin liner inside the existing pipe, creating a new pipe within.
- Epoxy coating (eDrain®) – cleans and coats the interior of pipes with epoxy to seal leaks and cracks.
- Pipe bursting – breaks apart the old pipe while pulling in a new one.

Trenchless technologies are especially valuable for commercial facilities where downtime, tenant impact, or excavation would be costly.

Managing Costs

Repairs can be expensive. Options for easing the cost include:

- Requesting an extension from HPW if you need more time.
- Asking your contractor about payment plans.
- Reviewing your insurance policy or adding a service line rider.
- Exploring community grant or assistance programs in qualifying neighborhoods.

The key is communication. Ignoring the letter leads to penalties and higher costs.

Why This Affects Commercial Property Owners Too

The initiative applies equally to commercial property owners, including HOAs, hospitals, schools, retail centers, and industrial facilities.

These properties often have more complex sewer systems and higher usage. Failing to repair private laterals can result in health code violations, tenant complaints, operational downtime, and legal liability.

How Property Owners Can Take Action

The City will not assign you a contractor or pay for your repairs. Property owners are responsible for finding their own licensed plumber.

TDT Plumbing specializes in trenchless technologies that restore pipes without excavation, saving time and money while keeping facilities operational. We are the only Authorized Provider in Texas for eDrain technology.

Repair Technologies Available Through TDT Plumbing

TDT Plumbing offers a range of solutions, including:

- ePipe® – patented epoxy barrier coating that seals pinhole leaks and restores pipes. TDT Plumbing is the only certified ePipe® provider in Texas.



- eDrain® – epoxy lining for sanitary sewer lines that stops inflow, infiltration, and cracks without digging.
- Cured-in-place pipe (CIPP), point repairs, and pipe bursting for more severe defects.

These methods minimize disruption and keep property owners compliant with City requirements.

Conclusion

Houston's sanitary sewer initiative is a federally mandated program to protect public health and the environment. Every property owner has a role to play. If you receive a notice, act quickly to avoid penalties and protect your property.

With trenchless solutions like ePipe® and eDrain®, TDT Plumbing restores systems efficiently, cost-effectively, and with minimal disruption—helping property owners stay compliant while avoiding costly downtime or damage.

About TDT Plumbing

TDT Plumbing is a Houston-based plumbing infrastructure company with more than 30 years of experience serving residential, commercial, and institutional clients across Texas and the Gulf Coast. As the only certified ePipe® and eDrain® provider in the State of Texas, TDT specializes in advanced trenchless rehabilitation systems that restore, renew, and protect pressurized and non-pressurized piping systems without excavation.

TDT's portfolio includes large-scale infrastructure projects for hotels, hospitals, schools, multifamily properties, HOAs, and industrial facilities. Using cutting-edge technologies such as ePipe®, eDrain®, cured-in-place pipe (CIPP), and epoxy lining systems, TDT helps property owners meet compliance requirements under Houston's sanitary sewer initiative while minimizing downtime and disruption.

TDT Plumbing's commitment to quality and innovation ensures sustainable, code-compliant solutions that extend the life of aging infrastructure and prevent future failures.

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