

MEDIA COMMITTEE RESOURCE GUIDE

May You Never Need This: Resources On Slab Leaks And Sewer Back-Ups

There's a lot to love about an older home in Central Austin but there are also drawbacks, one of which is 50+ year old plumbing. In our North Shoal Creek Neighborhood, five of its six subdivisions were built out between 1960 and 1971. The homes in these subdivisions (unless their plumbing systems have been updated) are probably cast iron. This link takes you to a map of North Shoal Creek's subdivisions and the years during which each was constructed:

http://www.nscna.org/?page_id=64.

There's nothing inherently bad about cast iron pipes. Thick, good quality cast iron pipes installed in ideal conditions can last from 75-100 years. However, the expected lifespan of cast iron waste pipe, installed below ground, is 50-60 years. And with in-slab plumbing, these pipes are hard to access. Leaks can develop and continue without homeowners being aware of the problem until the sewer backs up or foundation problems develop. And, because these pipes are hard to access and examine by eye, fixing them is expensive.

If you suspect your home's sewer line may be clogged and/or leaking, what are your options? There's no one easy answer to that. The goal of this article is to point you to online information that will help you understand and weigh your options and, hopefully, help you make a good decision.

- “Cast iron pipes and foundation problems” by Richard Levy, in the December 2013 issue of the *Allandale Neighbor Newsletter*, gives a good overview of the possible problems a homeowner may encounter:
<https://www.google.com/search?q=cast+iron+plumbing+austin&ie=utf-8&oe=ult-8#q=cast+iron+plumbing+austin&start=30>
- The Vortex Technologies, Inc. website has clear, basic articles such as “Plumbing repairs and reroutes,” which describes three repair/reroute methods: tunneling under the slab; breaking through the slab; and rerouting through an exterior wall. Another article, “Hydrostatic testing” describes the test used to determine if a pipe is leaking.
http://www.vortextechnologiesinc.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&limitstart=3
- “Is trenchless sewer pipe replacement a good idea?” by Angie Hicks, 9/17/2015, describes a relatively new option to the traditional tunneling approach to repair or reroute a sewer pipe under a slab: <https://www.angieslist.com/articles/trenchless-sewer-replacement-good-idea.htm>
- The InspectAPedia website, subtitled “free online encyclopedia of building & environmental inspection, testing, diagnosis, repair,” has detailed articles on sewer line repair but can be difficult to navigate: <http://inspectapedia.com/plumbing/>
- Tips for hiring a sewer line specialist can be found in “Valuable tips when hiring a sewer repair contractor”: <http://www.plumbers911.com/sewer-repair-contractor/>

- Maintenance tips for sewer lines: “Caring for your plumbing system” by Joe Bousquin: <http://www.houselogic.com/home-advice/plumbing/plumbing-system-maintenance/>; and “5 tips on how to prevent clogged sewer lines”: <http://www.simplysewersdenver.com/5-tips-on-how-to-prevent-clogged-sewer-lines/>.
- Insurance coverage: Is a back-up or broken sewer pipe covered? The short answer is, it depends on several factors, so discuss this with your agent. Coverage of both sewer drain backups and damage to foundation or slab are now endorsement and not part of a standard Texas homeowner’s policy. This article, “Does homeowner’s insurance cover replacing a broken sewer line” by James Hirby, may be helpful: <http://thelawdictionary.org/article/does-homeowners-insurance-cover-replacing-a-broken-sewer-line/>
- Costs: The Home and Garden section of the Costhelper site offers cost estimates. Search “sewer line replacement cost” or “slab leak cost”: <http://home.costhelper.com>
- Austin’s Water Department may attempt to help with a sewage overflow issue, but it is the responsibility of the homeowner to repair or replace their sewer line. For information about getting a permit and financial assistance options, contact the Private Lateral Program at 512-972-0069. In the event of a sewer overflow, stop using any water, contact the Austin Water Dispatch Office at 512-972-1000, and remove the clean out cap to reduce pressure.
- Regular maintenance of your plumbing system: According to an article about drain cleaners in the Nov. 2006 issue of *Consumer Reports*, try to clear a clog mechanically with a plunger, a snake, or a gas or water powered device; avoid chemical drain cleaners; and use biological drain cleaners on a regular basis to keep drains clear of clogs. <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2006/11/consumer-reports-review-of-drain-cleaners/index.htm>

If you know of other good resources on this topic, please let us know at mediacommittee@nscna.org. We’d like to see this list grow.

North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association Media Committee