OTTAWA WATERPROOFING PRO

Backwater Valves

Backwater valves as part of a basement flood plan: the normally open rule, permits, rebates and what a valve does not stop

4 Expert Answers from Waterproofing IQ

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Q1

Does a backwater valve need a clean-out access in an Orleans basement?

The City of Ottawa's backwater valve page says the valve must be located within the dwelling unit and accessible for inspection and maintenance. Ontario's Building Code (7.4.6.4) requires a backwater valve in a building drain to be of a "normally open" design and to serve no more than one dwelling unit. We found no separate clean-out rule for the valve; ask a licensed plumber how the access will be provided in your basement.

A few things worth knowing before the work starts. Plumber is a compulsory trade in Ontario under O. Reg. 876/21, so ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off the plumbing part of the installation. The City of Ottawa requires a building permit before a backwater valve is installed, with floor plans and the device's location, type, make and model submitted with the application. The City's backwater valve page says to book an inspection 48 hours in advance. The City also notes that in older homes, especially those with cast iron pipes, rust can accumulate at the hinge and prevent the valve from closing properly during a surcharge event, so ask the plumber about the existing pipe.

On access more broadly: the City's protective plumbing FAQ says to look for a backwater valve between the last branch of the sewer line and where the pipe exits the foundation, and may look like a Y-shaped fitting with the branch plugged and pointing up. If yours is already in place and you are asking about an existing installation, ask the plumber whether it can be reached for inspection and maintenance.

Ask any contractor quoting the job to spell out in writing exactly what access provisions they are including, which Code clauses they are meeting, and who is pulling the permit.

If you want quotes from local contractors, the request form on this page sends your details to Ottawa waterproofing contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q2

Should a backwater valve be part of a basement waterproofing plan in Ottawa?

A backwater valve and basement waterproofing address different ways water gets into a basement, so whether a valve belongs in your plan depends on which problem you are actually solving.

The City of Ottawa identifies three ways water enters a basement: sewer surcharging (sewage backing up through the drain lateral), groundwater leaking through cracks or joints in walls or floors, and overland water coming in through windows, doors or cracks. A backwater valve is a plumbing device that closes when flow reverses in the

building drain, so it addresses the first cause. Waterproofing, drain tile and sump systems address the second. The City's protective plumbing FAQ says these devices will not stop water from entering through cracks in walls, failed foundation drains, poor lot drainage or overflowing eavestroughs.

If your basement flooding comes from groundwater, a backwater valve alone will not fix it. If it comes from sewer surcharging, a membrane or interior drain system will not fix it. If you have had both, or are not certain which is the source, a contractor or licensed plumber needs to look at the house before you decide what to install.

The two are not mutually exclusive: a flood plan for one house can include both, once the contractor or plumber has said which entry points apply.

A few things worth knowing if a valve is part of the conversation:

- The City's Residential Protective Plumbing Program offers rebates on indoor sanitary backwater valves (up to $1,000), storm backwater valves (up to $1,000) and outdoor storm backwater valves (up to $2,500). The City rebates the lesser of the maximum or the actual cost of the work. The work must be complete and the rebate application received within 18 months of the building permit's issue date, following the City's change to that window on July 1, 2026. The City lists the program as currently under review, so check ottawa.ca before relying on it.
- A building permit is required before the valve is installed, with floor plans and the device's location, type, make and model.
- Ontario's Building Code (clause 7.4.6.4) requires a backwater valve in a building drain to be of a normally open design and serve no more than one dwelling unit.
- Plumber is a compulsory trade in Ontario, so ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off the plumbing part of the installation.

Start by asking a licensed plumber to identify which entry point caused your flooding, because the answer determines whether a backwater valve, waterproofing work, or both belong in your plan.

Q3

Who maintains a backwater valve in an Ottawa home?

The owner of the home is responsible for maintaining a backwater valve, to the manufacturer's directions. Ontario's Building Code (7.4.6.4) requires a backwater valve in a building drain to be of a normally open design serving no more than one dwelling unit, and the City's backwater valve page says it must be located within the dwelling unit and accessible for inspection and maintenance. That is the City of Ottawa's position, stated in its protective

plumbing FAQ.

The City adds a practical note worth knowing: in older homes, particularly those with cast iron pipes, rust can accumulate at the hinge of the valve and prevent it from closing properly during a surcharge event.

What maintenance involves, on what schedule, and what signs to look for are questions for whoever installed the valve, or a licensed plumber if you do not know who that was. Plumber is a compulsory trade in Ontario. You can check whether someone is authorized to do that work through the Skilled Trades Ontario Public Register.

To find the valve in your home, the City's FAQ says to look between the last branch of the sewer line and where the pipe exits the foundation. It may look like a Y-shaped fitting with the branch plugged and pointing up.

One boundary worth knowing: the City is responsible for the sewer lateral from the property line to the street. From the property line to the house is the homeowner's side, which includes the valve itself.

If the valve is not working as it should, ask a licensed plumber to look at it. The City's FAQ and permit pages are the right place to check if you have questions about whether replacement work requires a permit.

Q4

Who pays to clear a blocked sewer lateral in Orleans?

The homeowner is responsible for the sewer lateral from the house to the property line; the City of Ottawa is responsible from the property line to the street.

When a lateral is blocked, the City names two situations where it considers the blockage its problem: roots from a City-owned tree have grown into the pipe, or the damage is on City property. For anything else, the cost falls to the homeowner. If you are not sure which side of the property line the blockage is on, ask the City before you hire anyone.

A few things are worth knowing before you call a plumber. The lateral under your property is your responsibility to clear and to repair if it is damaged. If a plumber finds the problem is on the City's side of the property line, contact the City. If the work is on your side and involves opening the floor or altering the drain line inside the house, that is plumbing work, and plumber is a compulsory trade in Ontario under O. Reg. 876/21, meaning the person doing it must be authorized under that regulation.

The City's protective plumbing program does not cover clearing or repairing a blocked lateral. The Compassionate Grant, a $1,000 payment the City offers after basement flooding, applies only where the flooding was caused by sewer surcharging, not by a lateral blockage. The City lists the grant as currently under review, so check ottawa.ca before counting on it.

If the lateral repair leads to excavation outside the house, the contractor doing the digging must submit a locate request before any digging starts. Ontario Dig Authority asks for that request at least 5 business days before work begins, and the request is free.

For a blocked lateral in Orleans, start with a plumber, and check their certificate on the Skilled Trades Ontario Public Register.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Waterproofing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any waterproofing or foundation project. Some of this work needs a City building permit, and a free locate request is required before any digging. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawawaterproofingpro.com** for the latest answers.