OTTAWA WATERPROOFING PRO

Sump Pits & Pumps

Sump pit minimums, discharge rules, battery backup and replacing a pump in an Ottawa home

4 Expert Answers from Waterproofing IQ

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Q1

Who looks after a sump pump in an Ottawa home?

The City of Ottawa says the owner is responsible for maintaining protective plumbing devices to the manufacturer's directions.

Ontario's Building Code sets the minimums the pit itself must meet: at least 750 mm deep and at least 0.25 m² in area, with a cover that resists removal by children and is airtight (9.14.5.2). A storm sump discharge has a union and a check valve, in that order, and is pumped to above grade level (7.4.6.3).

That means keeping the sump pump working falls to you, not the City. What the manufacturer's directions cover varies by make and model, so the starting point is the manual that came with the pump.

Questions worth asking a plumber or waterproofing contractor: what testing the pump needs and on what schedule, and what a test involves. Ontario advises testing sump pumps and installing a backup power system such as a battery backup. Plumber is a compulsory trade in Ontario, so ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off any plumbing work on the pump or its discharge line.

The City also points out that a sump pump will not stop water from entering through cracks in walls or window wells, failed foundation drains, overflowing eavestroughs and plugged downspouts, poor foundation drainage, or poor lot drainage. If water is getting into the pit faster than the pump can handle, the source of that water is a separate question, and a contractor needs to look at the house.

If you are replacing the pump, ask the City whether the job needs a permit, since replacing a pump in an existing pit is not named on either of its lists.

Q2

Does the City of Ottawa require a sealed sump lid?

The cover rule comes from Ontario's Building Code rather than a separate City rule: a sump pit must have a cover that resists removal by children and is airtight (9.14.5.2). The City of Ottawa enforces the Code through its building permits, and it says a permit is required to install a sump pit and pump.

The same clause sets the pit's minimum size: at least 750 mm deep and at least 0.25 m² in area. Where gravity drainage is not practical, an automatic sump pump is required. A storm sump discharge gets a union and a check valve, in that order in the direction of flow, and is pumped to above grade level (7.4.6.3). The City advises connecting the pump to the storm sewer or discharging to the ground at least 1.2 metres from the foundation.

If the pit is new, the permit application includes floor plans showing the device's location, type, make and model. Once the work is complete, the City's steps for its protective plumbing rebate include the building permit inspection, and the inspection report is one of the documents the rebate application asks for.

When you get a quote, ask for the cover's make and model in writing and whether it is airtight and child-resistant as the Code requires, who pulls the building permit, and who arranges the City inspection. Ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off the plumbing part of the installation.

Before you agree to anything, ask the contractor to confirm in writing that the pit, the cover and the discharge will be built to those Code minimums.

Q3

Is the 1.2 metre sump discharge distance an Ottawa rule or advice?

The 1.2 metre figure is City of Ottawa advice, not a requirement in Ontario's Building Code.

The Building Code addresses sump discharge in clause 7.4.6.3. It requires a union and a check valve in the discharge line, and that the pump discharge to above grade level. It sets no minimum horizontal distance from the foundation for where that water lands.

The City's flooding guidance recommends connecting the sump pump to the storm sewer or, where that is not possible, discharging to the ground at least 1.2 metres from the foundation.

Downspouts are a separate question, covered by ottawaeavestroughs.com.

If a contractor is proposing to run the sump discharge to daylight rather than tie it into the storm lateral, ask them where the outlet will be, how far from the foundation, and how the discharge point will be graded so water moves away from the house. If they are connecting to the storm lateral instead, ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off the plumbing portion, and who pulls the building permit, since the City requires one for plumbing alterations and additions.

Before agreeing to any discharge arrangement, ask the contractor to show you in writing exactly where the water goes and confirm it will not drain back toward the foundation after the ground settles.

Q4

When does Ontario's Building Code require a sump pump?

Ontario's Building Code requires an automatic sump pump where gravity drainage from the foundation drain is not practical (clause 9.14.5.2). The Code gives no checklist for "not practical", so ask the contractor to explain in writing why gravity drainage will or will not work at your house.

What the Code sets out

The sump pit itself must be at least 750 mm deep and at least 0.25 m² in area, with a cover that resists removal by children and is airtight. Where a pump is required, it must operate automatically. The discharge must include a union and a check valve in that order in the direction of flow, and the water is pumped to above grade level; or the connection includes a union, a check valve and a shut-off valve (clause 7.4.6.3).

Foundation drainage is required at the bottom of every foundation wall that encloses the building interior, unless it can be shown to be unnecessary (clause 9.14.2.1). The drain tile or pipe must be at least 100 mm in diameter, laid so its top sits below the bottom of the floor slab, and surrounded on the top and sides by at least 150 mm of crushed stone or other clean coarse granular material (clause 9.14.3.3). That drainage has to go somewhere: to a sewer, a drainage ditch or a dry well (clause 9.14.5.1). When none of those outlets is reachable by gravity, the pump is what makes the system work.

The City of Ottawa requires a building permit to install a sump pit and pump, and the permit application must include floor plans and the device's location, type, make and model. Because a pump connects to plumbing, ask whether a licensed plumber does or signs off the plumbing portion.

The City's protective plumbing rebate lists sump pumps with battery backup; check ottawa.ca for the current terms, since the City lists the program as under review.

A contractor looking at your basement can tell you whether gravity drainage to an available outlet is feasible, or whether a pump is the only way to move the water. That is the site-specific call the Code leaves to the person on the ground.

Before you agree to anything, ask the contractor to show you on a sketch exactly where the discharge line runs and where it outlets, so you know the water is going somewhere the Code and the City both accept.

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.