Portland Faces Rising Sewage Emergencies as Cougar Restoration Inc. Responds to Health and Infrastructure Challenges

April 14, 2025

TIGARD, OR - April 14, 2025 -

Portland continues to face mounting challenges from sewage-related emergencies, prompting concern among residents, city officials, and restoration experts. From aging infrastructure to extreme weather events, the frequency of sewage backups and overflows has increased in recent years, posing substantial health and environmental risks. Cougar Restoration Inc., a Tigard-based emergency clean-up company, has been among the local responders addressing the surge in such incidents throughout the metro region.

Over just three years, nearly 200 Portland homeowners filed claims against the city after suffering damages from sewer backups, highlighting the scale and recurrence of these events. The city?s infrastructure, much of which dates back more than eighty years, is a contributing factor. One-third of Portland?s 2,500 miles of sewer lines are older than most modern systems are designed to last. Tree root intrusions, decaying pipes, and inadequate drainage capacity have made some neighborhoods particularly vulnerable, especially during periods of heavy rainfall. In February 2025, a storm triggered a combined sewer overflow that released 28 million gallons of untreated waste and stormwater into the Willamette River. Environmental officials urged residents to avoid contact with the river for at least 48 hours due to the high levels of bacteria and

contaminants. Similar overflows, while reduced compared to earlier decades, still occur a few times a year.

Improper disposal of household waste adds further strain to the system. In one documented case, 5,000 gallons of raw sewage spilled onto a Southwest Portland roadway due to a blockage caused by cooking grease and flushed wipes. Though marketed as disposable, these materials frequently accumulate and cause significant pipe obstructions. Public education campaigns emphasize the importance of flushing only waste and toilet paper and avoiding pouring oils and grease down kitchen drains.

The consequences of these sewage events extend far beyond inconvenience. Public health officials have warned that exposure to raw sewage can lead to serious health problems. Infections from bacteria like Shigella or viruses such as Hepatitis A can occur when contaminated water or soil is touched or inhaled. Gastroenteritis is among the most common illnesses linked to exposure, but more severe diseases have been reported, especially among vulnerable populations. In light of this, the Oregon Health Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency both advise prompt, professional remediation after any exposure to sewage within homes or workplaces.

Cougar Restoration Inc. plays a critical role in the aftermath of such events. When sewage backs up into basements or infiltrates crawlspaces, the company?s teams are dispatched to manage the cleanup. The process typically involves the removal of raw sewage, the disposal of contaminated materials, and the sanitization of all exposed surfaces. In crawlspaces, crews perform a more extensive process, including digging out contaminated soil, removing insulation, spraying disinfectants, and installing new vapor barriers. Using industrial-grade equipment and adherence to safety protocols ensures that properties are restored to safe and habitable conditions.

Service areas covered by Cougar Restoration Inc. include not only Portland but also surrounding cities such as Tigard, Hillsboro, Salem, and Beaverton, among others. The company?s office on SW 85th Avenue in Tigard enables efficient dispatch to a broad geographic area where rapid response is often necessary to mitigate damage. During emergencies, crews are trained to move swiftly, extracting and hauling contaminated waste off-site, disinfecting structural materials, and controlling odors with appropriate treatments.

As Portland works to address its wastewater infrastructure issues, cleanup providers like Cougar Restoration Inc. remain on standby to assist when the system fails. Their work complements city crews responsible for repairing mains and managing public spills. Together, these efforts form a response network to protect public health and minimize property damage when sewage incidents occur.

While the city has made strides in modernizing its wastewater systems?most notably through the completion of the Big Pipe project in 2011, which reduced overflow events by over 90 percent?many neighborhoods

remain at risk. Upcoming plans to upgrade the city?s largest wastewater treatment plant signal a long-term investment in resilience, but until those projects are completed, the likelihood of backups remains high. As a result, emergency sewage clean-up services are not just reactive but essential.

The recurring nature of Portland?s sewage issues has transformed what were once rare emergencies into routine hazards for homeowners and businesses alike. Each incident underscores the fragile balance between aging systems and growing environmental pressures. By responding promptly to contaminated environments and adhering to stringent safety standards, restoration teams help reduce the long-term impact of these events. Their role in the broader environmental health landscape remains indispensable.

###

For more information about Cougar Restoration, contact the company here:Cougar RestorationBrian(503)349-5538brian@cougarrestoration.com16285 SW 85th Ave, Tigard, OR 97224, United States

Cougar Restoration

Cougar Restoration offers Water, Mold, Smoke, and Sewage Damage Cleanup Services throughout Portland Metro, Oregon. Our staff has more than 30 years of experience in the construction industry.

Website: https://cougarrestoration.com/

Email: brian@cougarrestoration.com

Phone: (503)349-5538