CALGARY PLUMBING PRO

Drains & Clogs

Slow and blocked drains, snaking versus hydro-jetting, drain camera inspections, recurring clogs and floor drains in Calgary homes

4 Expert Answers from Plumbing IQ

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Q1

Standing water in the basement shower of my Calgary house after laundry?

Standing water in a basement shower right after the washing machine drains is almost always a sign that the shared drain line is partially blocked somewhere downstream of where both fixtures connect. The laundry machine dumps a large volume of water quickly, and if the line can't carry it fast enough, the water backs up and finds the lowest fixture in the house, which in most basements is the shower floor drain.

What's likely happening and what a plumber checks

The blockage could be lint and soap buildup inside the branch line, a partial clog in the main stack, or a restriction further along the building drain before it reaches the sewer. Basement drains sit at the bottom of the drainage system, so they're the first to show symptoms. A plumber will run a drain snake or camera down the cleanest access point to locate where the restriction is and what's causing it.

A camera inspection matters here because the fix depends on what's in the pipe. Lint and grease clear with snaking or hydro-jetting; a root intrusion, a collapsed section, or a belly in the line is a different conversation entirely. Drain camera work in Calgary typically runs $200 to $600; ask whether that fee is credited toward the repair if you proceed.

Clearing a main line blockage usually runs around $400; hydro-jetting a main line, if the buildup is heavy, is $400 to $800. If the camera shows a damaged section, a spot sewer repair is roughly $1,000 to $3,000, and a longer replacement goes well beyond that.

One thing to check before the plumber arrives: if your basement has a backwater valve, lift the access cover and make sure the flap is clean and moving freely. A stuck flap can restrict drainage and mimic a clog.

On the permit side, clearing a drain or snaking a line doesn't require a City of Calgary plumbing permit. If the plumber finds a damaged section and needs to open the drain line or alter the piping, a permit would be needed at that point, and the contractor pulls it.

Before you hire, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate confirming they're a certified journeyperson or a registered apprentice working under one. That's a compulsory certification trade in Alberta under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. Also ask for a WCB-Alberta clearance letter and, if any deposit is required before the work is complete, confirm the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence through Service Alberta.

A fair quote for this job should include the camera inspection as a separate line, the method of clearing (snake versus jetting), whether the camera footage is yours to keep, and what happens if the camera finds something

structural.

Seeing the camera footage for yourself, with the plumber explaining what it shows, is the step that protects you from agreeing to the wrong repair.

Q2

How long does a hydro-jet cleaning last on a Calgary sewer?

How long hydro-jetting holds up depends more on your pipe's condition and what caused the blockage than on the cleaning method itself. There is no standard answer: a sound line with a one-off grease blockage can stay clear for a long time, while a line with root intrusion, offset joints or deteriorating walls will need attention again, however well the jetting went.

What actually determines the result

Grease and soap buildup in a kitchen line can return faster than roots in a clay sewer, because cooking habits do not change. Roots are persistent: they re-enter through the same crack or joint that let them in the first time, and jetting cuts them back without sealing the opening. If the line has a belly (a low spot where water pools), debris will collect there again no matter how clean the rest of the pipe is.

This is why a camera inspection before or after jetting matters so much. Hydro-jetting costs roughly $400 to $800 for a main line in Calgary; adding a camera inspection runs about $200 to $600. Spending that extra amount tells you whether the pipe has cracks, root entry points or a belly that will shorten the result, and whether a spot repair or lining is worth considering before the problem comes back.

Never agree to a sewer replacement without seeing the camera footage yourself. A reputable plumber will show you the recording and explain what they found.

What a fair quote for this work includes

Ask for a fixed price that covers the jetting, the camera inspection (before and after, ideally), removal of the debris, and a written report on the pipe's condition. The quote should state whether the price changes if the technician finds roots or a collapsed section mid-job, and what the warranty covers if the line backs up again within a defined period. Get the warranty terms in writing and compare them across quotes, because there is no industry-standard length.

Permits and who does the work

Drain cleaning and hydro-jetting do not alter the plumbing system, so they do not require a plumbing permit under the Alberta Permit Regulation or the City of Calgary's rules. The work should still be done by a certified journeyperson plumber or a registered apprentice working under one, as plumbing is a compulsory certification trade in Alberta under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. Ask to see the plumber's trade certificate before the work starts, confirm the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if you are paying any deposit before the job is complete, and request a WCB-Alberta clearance letter; WCB-Alberta says anyone who hires a contractor without coverage could be responsible for unpaid premiums.

Before you book, ask the plumber directly whether a camera inspection is included, what the report will show, and whether the condition of your pipe changes the scope or the price.

Q3

Are chemical drain cleaners bad for older Calgary pipes?

Chemical drain cleaners are hard on older pipes, and in a Calgary home with aging plumbing they can quietly make a slow drain into a much bigger problem. That said, the real issue is not one bottle used once; it is repeated use over months or years.

What the chemistry does to older pipe materials

The active ingredients in most chemical drain cleaners generate heat and a caustic reaction to dissolve organic blockages. In newer PVC or ABS plastic drains that reaction is mostly harmless if used sparingly. In older homes, the pipes more likely to be affected are:

Cast iron and galvanized steel drains in older homes, where repeated chemical exposure is hard on pipes that may already be thinning from decades of use.

There is a second practical problem: if you call a plumber after using chemical cleaners and do not mention it, they may snake or camera the line and encounter residue that is still caustic. Always tell the plumber what went down the drain before they start work.

Chemical cleaners also mask the real problem. A drain that keeps slowing down usually has a partial blockage, a buildup of scale (Calgary's hard water leaves calcium deposits in drains just as it does in water heaters), root intrusion, or a pipe that has shifted. A cleaner may restore flow for a few weeks while the underlying cause continues to develop. A camera inspection, typically $200 to $600 in Calgary, shows what is actually happening inside the pipe.

What to do instead.

For a sink or tub that drains slowly, a plumber's snake or hydro-jet clears the blockage mechanically without chemical contact with the pipe wall. Clearing a sink or tub drain by a plumber typically runs $150 to $300; a main line around $400, and hydro-jetting a main line $400 to $800. Those ranges reflect 2025-2026 Calgary figures and move based on access, how far the blockage is, and whether the plumber charges a flat rate or an hourly rate plus a call-out fee (commonly $50 to $150).

Before hiring anyone for recurring drain problems, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate confirming they are a certified journeyperson or a registered apprentice working under one. That is a requirement under Alberta's Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act for anyone doing this work for pay. Also ask for a WCB-Alberta clearance letter confirming their account is in good standing.

A written quote for drain work should spell out whether the price is fixed or hourly, what the call-out fee is, whether a camera inspection is included or priced separately, how the plumber will access the cleanout, and what the warranty covers on labour. When you are comparing two quotes side by side, line up the scope of the camera inspection, the method used (snake versus hydro-jet), and whether disposal of any debris or a follow-up visit is included, not just the headline number.

Q4

Kitchen sink backing up into the other basin in Calgary, why?

When one basin backs up into the other, the shared drain line between the two sinks is partially or fully blocked somewhere between the P-trap and the point where that line meets the main stack. Water takes the path of least resistance, and if the drain is sluggish or stopped, it pushes back up through the other basin's opening.

What is actually happening under your sink

Both basins of a double kitchen sink share a single drain assembly that joins into one P-trap or a centre tee before heading into the wall. A grease, food particle or soap build-up anywhere in that shared section creates a partial dam. Running water in one basin raises the level in the shared pipe until it spills into the other. A fully blocked line will back both basins up at once.

The usual suspects are grease accumulation (cooking fats solidify in the pipe), food debris that bypassed the strainer, soap scum layered over time, or a combination of all three. If a garburator is on one side, ground food particles are a frequent contributor.

Before you call anyone, try this: remove the P-trap cleanout plug if there is one, or remove the P-trap itself with a bucket underneath. Clear any visible blockage. If the trap is clear, the clog is further down the drain arm or in the wall. A plunger on one basin while the other is sealed with a wet cloth can sometimes shift a partial blockage, but repeated chemical drain cleaner use is hard on older pipes, so tell any plumber you hire if you have used one.

If clearing the trap does not fix it, the blockage is in the horizontal drain arm running into the wall, or in the stack itself. That is where a plumber's snake or, for a stubborn clog, hydro-jetting becomes the right tool.

Typical Calgary cost for a professional drain clearing: a kitchen sink line runs roughly $150 to $300 for a standard snake; if the blockage is in the main line, expect around $400, and hydro-jetting a main line runs $400 to $800. A call-out or service fee of $50 to $150 on top of the labour rate is common, so ask about that upfront.

No permit is needed in Calgary to clear a drain blockage or to remove and reinstall a P-trap, as long as the piping itself is not being altered.

If the drain backs up repeatedly within a few months, ask the plumber to run a camera down the line. A camera inspection costs $200 to $600 and will show whether there is a partial collapse, a belly in the pipe, or root intrusion that snaking alone will not fix long-term. Agreeing to a sewer repair without seeing that footage first is one of the more expensive mistakes a homeowner can make.

When you get a quote, the line most likely to hide extra cost is the hourly rate after the first hour, so ask whether the price is fixed or whether it converts to an hourly charge once the job runs long.

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