CALGARY PLUMBING PRO

Sewer Lines

Sewer service line backups, tree roots, camera findings, trenchless versus excavated repair and replacement, and which part of the line is the homeowner's

4 Expert Answers from Plumbing IQ

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Q1

Sewer cleanout outside my Calgary house is cracked, who fixes it?

Repairing or replacing a cracked sewer cleanout is plumber's work. There is no single going rate: a plumber prices it after seeing it, at roughly **$85 to $150 an hour** plus a call-out fee, and the price climbs quickly if the crack extends below the soil line or if concrete has to be opened.

What drives the cost

The cleanout cap itself is inexpensive, but the labour depends on where the crack is and how far it goes. A crack limited to the cap or the riser above grade is a short job. A crack in the body of the cleanout fitting, or one that has let soil or roots into the pipe, means the plumber needs to dig down to the fitting and may find damaged pipe beyond it. If the cleanout sits under a concrete pad, driveway or landscaping, add the cost of cutting and patching. A camera inspection, typically $200 to $600, is worth doing before any repair so you know exactly what you are dealing with below grade.

Plumbing permit rules for Calgary: replacing a cleanout fitting alters the drainage system, so the City of Calgary requires a plumbing permit. A homeowner who owns and lives in the home may apply for that permit if they do the work themselves; when you hire a plumber, the plumber takes it out, so confirm that in writing before work starts. A homeowner cannot take out a permit for a contractor's work.

Who owns this pipe: if you are unsure whether the cracked cleanout is on your side, ask the City of Calgary. After a backup, the City can run a snake to the main at no charge to confirm whether a blockage is on private or public property.

What a fair quote covers: ask for a fixed price that spells out the scope (cap only, or full fitting replacement), whether a camera inspection is included or priced separately, how much concrete or excavation is involved, permit and inspection fees, backfill and surface patching, and a warranty on both parts and labour. Get at least two written quotes and compare scope, not just the total.

Before hiring: ask to see the plumber's trade certificate (plumbing is a compulsory certification trade in Alberta), confirm they hold an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if you are paying any deposit before the work is complete, and request a WCB-Alberta clearance letter.

While you wait for the plumber, locate your main water shut-off inside the house so you can close it quickly if a backup occurs, and keep the cleanout cap in place or covered so debris does not enter the line.

Q2

Can roots be cut instead of replacing my Calgary sewer line?

Root cutting buys time, but whether it buys enough time depends on what the camera shows. In Calgary, mechanical root cutting or hydro-jetting a root-invaded sewer line typically runs $400 to $800 for the clearing work alone, while a full camera inspection beforehand costs $200 to $600. That inspection is not optional here: it is the only way to know whether cutting makes sense or whether you are spending money on a line that is already failing.

What the camera tells you

Roots find sewer lines through hairline cracks and joint gaps. If the pipe itself is still structurally sound, a plumber can cut the roots back with a mechanical auger or flush them out with a hydro-jet, and the line may flow freely for a year or several years depending on tree species, root density and pipe condition. If the camera shows the pipe is cracked, has collapsed sections, has significant offset joints, or is made of a material that is already deteriorating, cutting the roots is a temporary fix on a pipe that will need replacement regardless.

Pipe material matters here. Older clay tile lines have many joints, and joints are exactly where roots enter. A clay line with heavy root intrusion and cracked bells is a different situation from a newer ABS line with roots at one joint.

Root cutting is not a permanent solution. Roots regrow. A line that needed cutting once will need it again, often on a shortening cycle. Some plumbers apply a root-inhibiting foam after cutting, which may slow regrowth, but it does not stop it.

Repair options if the pipe is still sound.

If the camera confirms the pipe is intact, you have three realistic paths: periodic mechanical clearing, trenchless lining (cured-in-place pipe), or pipe bursting. Trenchless lining runs roughly $5,000 to $12,000 and seals the interior of the existing pipe, eliminating the joints roots exploit. Pipe bursting is in a similar range. A full dig-and-replace runs $4,500 to $15,000 or more depending on depth, length and what sits above the line, such as a driveway or landscaping.

Permits and who does the work.

Sewer line repair or replacement in Calgary requires a plumbing permit from the City of Calgary, and the work must be done by a certified journeyperson plumber or a registered apprentice working under one. That is a compulsory certification trade under Alberta's Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. Before signing anything, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate, confirm they hold an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if any deposit changes hands before the work is complete, and get a WCB-Alberta clearance letter.

A fair written quote for this job should name the scope clearly: whether it covers clearing only or repair, the method, the equipment, the permit and inspection, excavation and backfill if applicable, concrete or surface restoration, and the warranty on both parts and labour.

Before you sign, ask the plumber to walk you through the camera footage and explain exactly what condition the pipe is in at every point where roots appear.

Q3

Sewer line replacement in Calgary, how many days does it take?

Duration depends heavily on what method is used and what the pipe runs under, but most residential sewer line replacements in Calgary take somewhere between one and five days of active work on site.

What actually drives the timeline

A short spot repair, say a cracked section under the backyard, can be dug, fixed and backfilled in a single day if the crew hits no surprises. A full dig-and-replace from the foundation to the property line typically runs two to four days: one day to open the trench, one to pull the old pipe and lay the new one, and one to backfill and restore the surface. Add a day if the line runs under a driveway, a deck or mature landscaping that has to come up carefully.

Trenchless methods, pipe bursting or cured-in-place lining, often finish the underground work in one day because there is no open trench to manage. What takes longer is the setup, the camera inspection before the job, and the curing time for a liner. Budget two to three days total for a trenchless job, sometimes less.

Concrete cutting adds time. If the line runs under a basement slab, the crew has to cut, remove and later pour new concrete. That alone can add one to two days, plus a waiting period before the slab is strong enough to walk on.

The permit and inspection add calendar days, not necessarily work days. The City of Calgary requires a plumbing permit for sewer line replacement. The contractor pulls the permit before starting; starting without one doubles the permit fee. A rough-in inspection is required before the trench is backfilled or the slab is poured, so the crew has to pause and wait for a City inspector to sign off. If the inspection is booked same-day or next-day, this is a short wait. If the schedule is tight, it can stretch the job by a day. The final inspection happens after the work is complete.

The contractor must be a certified journeyperson plumber or a registered apprentice working under one. Ask to see the trade certificate before signing anything.

A realistic total timeline from quote to finished trench is often one to two weeks, once you account for the permit application, material lead times, and the inspection hold. Some contractors can move faster; others are booked out. Get a written schedule in the contract.

A fair quote for this job should include: the camera inspection report (insist on seeing the footage), the method and pipe material, the permit and inspection, excavation and backfill, concrete cutting and patching if needed, surface restoration, haul-away of the old pipe and spoil, and a warranty on both parts and labour. Compare quotes by scope, not just the total. Typical Calgary figures for 2025-2026 run from about $1,000 to $3,000 for a spot repair, $5,000 to $12,000 for trenchless work, and $4,500 to $15,000 or more for a full open-cut replacement depending on depth, length and what sits above the line.

Before paying any deposit, confirm the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence (Service Alberta), ask for a WCB-Alberta clearance letter, and get everything in a signed written contract that includes start and completion dates.

After the job is done, keep the permit, the inspection sign-off, the camera footage from before and after, and the contractor's warranty in writing; those documents matter if you sell the house or a dispute comes up later.

Q4

Which part of the sewer line does a Calgary homeowner maintain?

The clearest published split in Calgary is on the water side. For the sewer, the practical answer comes from a free City of Calgary check that shows whether a blockage sits on private or public property, and that tells you whose repair it is.

What the City of Calgary says about ownership

For the water supply side, the homeowner is responsible for the pipe running from the house out to the service valve, which sits at or near the property line. Repair costs on that stretch fall to the owner; the water meter itself is the City's responsibility.

For a sewer backup, the ownership boundary is less straightforward to pinpoint on your own. The City can send a crew to run a steel snake from the sewer main to find out whether a blockage sits on the private side or the public side, and that assessment is provided at no charge. If the blockage turns out to be on your property, the crew will tell you to call a plumber. City crews will not move furniture, pull back carpet, remove toilets or open drywall, so the follow-up is entirely the homeowner's to arrange.

Keep people away from any sewage that has backed up into the home. Sewage cleanup is not a straightforward DIY job; a professional restoration company handles it properly.

Once a plumber is involved, insist on a camera inspection before agreeing to any repair. A camera run, which typically costs $200 to $600 in Calgary, shows exactly where the problem is, what caused it (root intrusion, a collapsed section, grease buildup, a belly in the line) and how far it extends. That footage also tells you whether a spot repair ($1,000 to $3,000) is realistic or whether a longer trenchless lining, pipe bursting or full dig-and-replace is needed. Trenchless methods generally run $5,000 to $12,000; a full replacement can reach $15,000 or more depending on depth, length and what sits above the line.

For any repair that alters the sewer line, the City of Calgary issues the plumbing permit. A contractor pulls that permit; a homeowner cannot take out a permit for a contractor's work. The City's inspection of the permitted work is your confirmation that it meets the National Plumbing Code of Canada 2020.

Before hiring, ask the plumber for their trade certificate number (plumbing is a compulsory certification trade in Alberta under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act), a WCB-Alberta clearance letter, and their Alberta prepaid contracting licence if any deposit changes hands before the job is finished. Get the scope, price, permit responsibility, disposal and any concrete cutting or patching in writing before work starts.

After the job wraps up, keep the permit, the inspection sign-off, the camera footage and the written contract together in one place; they are worth having if a warranty question comes up or if you sell the house.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Calgary Plumbing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority (the City of Calgary or your own municipality) before starting any plumbing or gas project. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **calgaryplumbingpro.com** for the latest answers.