

Pool and hot tub water discharge guidelines

The City of Ottawa's [Sewer Use By-law \(2025-94\)](#) regulates the discharge of materials into sewer systems. This is in place to protect public health, infrastructure, and the environment. It is prohibited to discharge harmful substances into the city's sewer systems:

- **Storm sewer systems** carry rainwater and snowmelt directly and without treatment into nearby creeks, rivers, or stormwater management ponds
- **Sanitary and combined sewer systems** transport wastewater to the wastewater treatment plant for treatment before it is safely returned to the environment.

The by-law prohibits diluting harmful substances to meet discharge limits and may require permits or pollution prevention plans for certain activities. Enforcement includes inspections, sampling, and penalties or fines for non-compliance.

Why proper discharge matters

Pool and hot tub water contains harmful chemicals like chlorine, bromine, salt, and copper-based algaecides. These are toxic to fish and aquatic life. When these chemicals enter the storm sewer, they flow untreated into local water bodies where they destroy delicate ecosystems and the bacteria that support aquatic life.



Responsibilities of pool and hot tub owners

Owners are legally responsible for the safe maintenance and discharge of their pool and hot tub water. Improper discharge can result in environmental damage and legal consequences.

Preparing your pool for the end of the season

- **Discharge on your property:** Pool and hot tub water can be discharged onto your property if it can be properly absorbed into the ground without migrating to a neighbour's property. Consider the slope and surface of your property and the discharge flow rate.
- Due to high chloride levels, **saltwater pools** are prohibited from being discharged into storm sewers. They must be discharged to the sanitary sewer connection on your property or collected and disposed of by a licensed hauler.

- **Filter backwash water:** Must be discharged to the sanitary sewer or onto your property if it can be absorbed into the ground. Backwash water is prohibited from being discharged into storm sewers due to harmful chemicals and debris.
- **Discharge to sanitary sewer:**
Most in-ground pools have a drain line connected to the sanitary sewer. Above-ground pools can be drained directly into the sanitary sewer by running a hose to an indoor drain such as a utility tub. Contact a licensed plumber for advice or assistance.

City's Responsibility

The City is committed to protecting the environment and will enforce environmental protection in accordance with the Sewer Use By-law when necessary.

For more information on the City's Sewer Use By-law, contact a representative of the Sewer Use Program at 613-580-2424 ext. 23326.