

Waterlogged basements defy usual explanations

For many persons in our area, this has been the summer from hell water-wise. On one July evening, I listened as a neighborhood group shared stories about flooded basements and all the measures they had tried to reduce it; most of which did not work.

I came with remedies and ideas for the common sources of water in basements, but I quickly learned that my solutions were no match for their problems. Water was backing up from city storm drains that could not handle all that the heavy rains were delivering.

One person, who had spent thousands of dollars digging around her house to waterproof, had several inches in her basement. The very system created to carry water away was now bringing it back to her. (If you look at basement waterproofing contracts closely, you will find the small print says that the company is not responsible if the city storm system cannot carry the water.

This area's huge new storm water line will not be ready for at least another year. Plus, many of the lines from our houses to the street are deteriorating, resulting in some sewage getting into the storm water backing into basements.

Some people have installed 'check valves' in their sewer and storm water lines. A check valve allows water and waste to exit, but does not permit them to come back through the system.

Another person attending the neighborhood session had had check valves installed, but still had water coming in. This could have come from a neighbor's broken storm drains traveling through the soils to her house. Other possible causes: a high water table from all the water accumulated over the summer, or aging storm and water lines leaking water and sewage and forcing it back around the outside of these pipes to the foundation.

Disconnecting downspouts will often reduce water entry into basements, but many cities still will not allow it. (Shaker does with a permit; Cleveland only on case-by-case basis.)

If all downspouts were disconnected, there would probably be some street flooding, but less water in basements. Disconnecting can be a problem. You must make sure the water does not flow toward your house or a neighbor's and that water does not pool for long periods permitting mosquitoes to thrive and risking West Nile Virus.

It may be of interest to all of you in this area's older homes, that I see as much basement water problems in brand-new homes as I see in old ones. My many years of basement investigations have persuaded me that we should not be using basements as living spaces and if we do, we should remodel them defensively. Assume at some time they will at least be damp; more than likely have some water leakage; and occasionally experience flooding.

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