

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Understanding Utility Easements

What is a utility easement? How is it created and what does it mean to a property owner? If you are planning to landscape, add fencing, pools, sheds or other exterior property improvements, it is important to know the answer to these questions...

At the time a plat for new development is designed, utility companies typically secure an easement to portions of the land they may need to provide immediate or future service to the community. Companies securing easements may include, water and sewer utilities, gas and electric companies, and cable television providers.



There are various types of easements and rights of way. Utility easements are different from fee simple rights of way. An easement is permission to use an area of land while the property owner maintains ownership. A fee simple right of way transfers ownership of the land to the public for public use through the local municipality, generally when a property is subdivided. Most rights of way and easements are recorded in deeds and plats in the land records of the County.

Utility easements entitle the utility companies to run their pipes, wires, cables, conduits, etc. across that portion of your property both over and under the ground. Most utility easements exist along the edge of the property abutting the roadway,

along rear lot lines, and often along property lines between lots. Although land within the easement belongs to the property owner, the easement gives the utility the right to place its pipes, cables, wires, etc. on the property and also to access them for maintenance, repair or replacement.

Additionally, in Anne Arundel County, in order to provide some customers with sewer service, it is necessary to use a low pressure system. This system uses a grinder pump to grind the sewage from the home and push the sewage through small plastic pipes to the larger lines in the street. County owned grinder pumps are placed in a utility easement extending 7 1/2 feet in all directions from the pump structure, to provide access for maintenance and service. Similarly, the on-site septic tanks in the Mayo system, also have a 7 1/2 foot utility easement in all directions from the tank to provide access to workers.

It is important to keep utility easements clear and assessable so that utility companies can perform routine maintenance (e.g. replace a pole or pipe), construct improvement projects (e.g. install a new sanitary sewer), and repair utility lines during emergencies (e.g. remove fallen branches from power lines).

Property owners cannot significantly change the area in any way that would prevent the utility from making reasonable use of the easement. For example, the planting of trees, shrubs, bushes or fences may interfere with the use of the ease-



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ment and are subject to being removed at the expense of the property owner. Building a shed, swimming pool, fish pond or any permanent structure over an easement would also be prohibited because it would readily deny the utility company the ability to maintain, repair or replace wires, pipes or cables that may run under the ground or overhead in that location. Any damage caused by moving an obstruction out of the way or removing a fence is not the responsibility of the utility company. Although utility companies make every effort to ensure minimal disruption, they do, by rights of the easement, have the power to do whatever necessary to maintain the utility.

Property owners who choose to put decorative landscaping within the boundaries of the easement, must understand that it is subject to damage and any replacement costs for those damages are at the discretion of the utility.

Utilities also have the right to mark utility locations within the easements. The type, color and location of these markings are regulated by state law for uniformity, clarity and safety.

Anne Arundel County’s Bureau of Utility Operations understands that work within utility easements may be a cause of concern for property owners. Therefore, Utilities makes every effort to be a good neighbor by communicating and cooperating with property owners and working in a fashion that results in minimal disruption, while performing the work necessary to provide reliable, consistently excellent water and wastewater service.



For Your Information...

- To learn more about the “Flush Tax” beginning January 2005 go to www.aacounty.org/dpw. Under *DPW News and Announcements* click on “New Flush Tax Coming”.
- Need tips to help protect your home this winter? Go to www.aacounty.org/dpw. Click on Customer Relations. Click on Customer Update issues for Winter 2002 or Winter 2000.
- Want to pay your Water/Sewer Utility bill on line? Go to www.aacounty.org and click on “View/Pay Bills on Line” under Quick Links.

Helpful Telephone Numbers for The Department of Public Works

24-hour EMERGENCY service for water and wastewater (after 3:30 p.m.) ... 410-222-8400
 South County... 410-451-4118

After 3:30 p.m., weekends and holiday EMERGENCY Service for stormdrains, roads, traffic lights/signs... 410-222-6120

For weekday EMERGENCIES (between 7:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.) involving stormdrains, roads, or traffic lights/signs, please call the appropriate district office. If you do not know what district to call, please call any of these Customer Relations numbers...

Customer Relations...	410-222-7582
General Information...	410-222-7500
Billing Information...	410-222-1144
Bulk Item Trash Service, Recycling Information, Trash Collection...	410-222-6100
Northern Roads District...	410-222-6120
Southern Roads District...	410-222-1933
Central Roads District...	
Crownsville Yard...	410-222-7940
Central Roads District...	
Odenton Yard...	410-222-6126

During snow emergencies (4” or more) customers in all roads districts please call... 410-222-4040

Anne Arundel County
 Department of Public Works
 2662 Riva Road
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