

Sewers Aren't Sexy...

But they're Critical to Protecting Public Health and the Environment

By: The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission

Our sewer system is a critical piece of our infrastructure – it carries waste from our homes and businesses to a wastewater treatment plant to be cleaned. The wastewater treatment process removes toxins, bacteria, and pollutants from the wastewater, returning cleaned water to the environment. This waste removal process is not only essential for protection of our environment, but is also necessary to protect public health. The sewer system must function properly in order to continue to reliably carry this waste away, but there is a looming threat to our sewers.

FOG is Fats, Oils, and Grease. Every day, FOG is being improperly disposed of - in sink drains and toilets in homes, and in poorly maintained grease traps in businesses and food service establishments. Once in the sewers, FOG builds up causing clogs, and inevitably, sewer backups.

The Wall Street Journal has reported that 75% of sewer systems in the United States work at only half capacity because of FOG clogs in sewer lines, and approximately 47% of sewer backups are due to FOG buildup. Repairs and maintenance resulting from FOG clogs cost taxpayers billions of dollars every year.

FOG (fats, oils, and grease) is the by-product of food preparation and the cleaning of dishes, pots, and pans. FOG is found in cooking oils, meat fats, butter, lard, margarine, cream based sauces, salad dressings, and dairy products. FOG does not dissolve in water as some people think – in fact, running hot water only pushes the FOG further down in the sewer system before it solidifies and builds up. This build up reduces the capacity of the sewer pipe, and eventually can result in a clog and sewer backup.

When sewers are clogged, they can back up into homes, streets, and businesses. These backups are called Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO), and they're not pretty. Raw sewage contains pollutants, pharmaceuticals, chemical toxins, pathogens, and bacteria.

The best way to help solve this problem is to reduce the amount of FOG (fats, oils, and grease) entering the sewer system.

To address this, the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission is actively promoting its FOG educational Program, "Cease The Grease Springfield." The goal is to educate the public and the food service industry about common sense practices that can reduce the amount of FOG entering the sewer system. Employees of the Commission have made presentations to neighborhood associations, college campuses, and non-profit groups. In addition, Commission staff makes personal site visits to food service establishments and other businesses with kitchens to educate staff on the proper disposal of FOG.



*Logo for Cease The Grease,
Springfield Program*

Here are some simple steps we all can follow to help prevent sewer backups:

NEVER:

- 1) Never pour grease down indoor sink drains or outdoor storm drains.
- 2) Never use the toilet to dispose of food grease or scraps, sanitary items, diapers, or towels.
- 3) Never flush 'disposable' or 'flushable' wipes – they do not dissolve and cause clogs.

ALWAYS:

- 1) Always dispose of cooled cooking grease into a container with a lid. You can use a coffee can, glass jar, or metal food can. When the container is full, throw it in the garbage.
- 2) Always scrape food scraps from dirty dishes and pans into the trash can before washing.
- 3) Always use a paper towel or a scraper to remove residual grease from dishes and pans prior to washing.
- 4) Always use a sink strainer to catch food scraps, and empty into the garbage.
- 5) Minimize the use of the garbage disposal - it does not eliminate grease, and FOG still goes into the pipes.

For large amounts of grease (from deep frying a turkey, for example), let the grease cool, combine with unscented cat litter or another clumping agent in a reinforced bag or strong container, and dispose of in the trash.

If we all do our part to help **Cease The Grease**, we can help keep our sewers healthy for years to come! For more information, please contact Joyce Mulvaney of the Springfield Water and Sewer Commission at 413-452-1302.