

About the City
by
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It was recently brought to my attention that Douglas is increasingly having a grease problem in the sewer system. Sometimes people unwittingly cause drain problems when they dispose of grease by pouring it down a drain or into a toilet.

You might think that an easy way of disposing of cooking fat is by making it nice and hot and pouring it down the drain. It is a liquid, isn't it? At first this might sound like a good idea, but as it travels down the drain, the grease cools, thickens, becomes less liquid, and coats the inside of the sewer pipes. The more it cools, the more it coagulates and the more it builds up in the sewer pipes. Adding really hot water to the sewer will help flush it further down the drain, and nearer to someone else's home however, at some point, it again cools and coats pipes further down the system. The further down the system it goes, the more people are involved with the resulting backup of sewage.

When enough grease builds up, the drain is plugged and the sewage backs up and results in flooding somewhere. That somewhere may not be in your basement, but it will likely be in someone's basement and in all probability, in several people's basements. Likely they will not be happy with you at this point because of the stench and little floater things in their basement! Any time you pour grease down a sink or into the toilet, it will cool, harden, and coat the pipes it travels through. **It is not a question of "if" but "where" it will happen.**

If the offending grease makes it all the way to the sewage plant, it will then interfere with the process of sewage treatment. This adds expense to an already costly process. The treatment will not progress as needed, possibly resulting in sewage being dumped into the river inappropriately, killing fish and other life in the stream, thus ruining your day at the fishing hole, causing you to go home upset, where you stub your toe and bang your shin because you're distracted by a day of fishing gone wrong. Then it spirals from there, and you trip over the family dog and step on your cat's tail. The dog bites the cat, the cat latches onto your arm, and you head to the ER to get the cat removed. All of this because someone dumped grease down the toilet!

So how can this be avoided? Please wait while I check with the man in charge of our sewer plant. Here is what he has to say: DON'T DO IT! Actually there is a very simple solution that each of us can do. Keep an empty container (tin cans work really well) near your kitchen range and pour the hot grease into the can. As it cools, it will harden and can then be disposed of into the household garbage. You could let the grease cool in the skillet and scrape it out with a spatula or turner, then wipe into a paper towel and place in the garbage. You could clean out the cool skillet with a paper towel directly. **JUST DON'T POUR GREASE DOWN THE DRAIN, PLEASE!**

So it is an easy fix, right? Just call the local roto-rooter and have them clean out the drain. \$200 later, and all is good! **Wrong:** the local roto-rooter likely has a rooter that makes about a two inch or less hole through the clog. Water flows through but probably not too much later it plugs again, and it will be sooner if you continue to pour grease down the drain! Next the City gets involved with our Vac truck. They can make a large hole which is much more affective. However, this does not solve the problem if you continue to pour grease down the drain. Again, **DON'T POUR GREASE DOWN THE DRAIN!**

The City tries to clean our sewer mains each year, but keep in mind that we have 36 miles of sewer main and only two Vac trucks, and sometimes they are not both operational. It takes a long time to clean 36 miles of sewer, and they really don't need the extra work of unclogging sewer lines that should never have been clogged in the first place.

While we are discussing grease, there are other items that increase the risk of drain and sewer line plugging. Wipes, baby wipes, tampons, sanitary napkins, condoms, hemeroidal pads, makeup tissues, cleaning cloths, and other items that will not disintegrate in the sewer lines should not be flushed down the toilet. Some of these products claim to be "flushable", which really only means it will flush down the toilet, not that it will disintegrate in the sewer line. All of these items will travel through the system until they get caught in a restricted area or a rough area of the pipe. So if the sewer is already compromised by grease or damage, these items will get caught and help clog the system. When these undesirable items make it all the way to the sewer facility they are screened back out of the sewage by a very expensive system. About once a week, someone has to take this bale of undesirable material to the landfill where it should have been sent before.

These undesirable items should be tossed into a waste basket and sent to the landfill, not flushed down the drain. This is something each of us can do very easily and save ourselves a lot of money. If it isn't toilet paper or didn't come out of your body, it shouldn't be flushed down the toilet! No manufactured products, please!

So why should you care about the problems you may cause for your neighbors or the City if you pour grease down the drain or dispose of undesirables inappropriately? One very good reason is the cost to you and your community. Where does the City get the money it spends? From us! You, me, and about 6,000 other people pay taxes and monthly fees. We all pay for the services our City provides, whether it is for good streets, water and sewer mains, street lights, park benches and tables, or whether the money is used to unclog drains and sewer lines which should not have been clogged. Wouldn't you rather have something usable to show for your hard earned money? There is no production in fixing things that shouldn't have been compromised. There is certainly no pleasure for the workers that have to do this unpleasant work. There is no pleasure for any of us when we have sewage back up into our basements. There is no pleasure in not being able to flush your toilet because the sewer line is plugged.

Wastewater is one of our four Enterprise Funds. State law requires Enterprise funds to operate as a business; the fund must generate income to offset expenses. What we spend must be paid for by earnings. Most of the earnings are fees each of us pay every month. So place an empty tin beside your kitchen stove and a waste basket beside your toilet and bathroom sink. Break the old habits and start new ones! I think you will soon be proud of what you are doing to save our City a lot of work and expense. Your dog and cat will like it better, and you can avoid the emergency room! Let's all keep the fees as low as we can and "ONLY if it's brown, flush it down"!