

Don't Grease the Pipes

Grease, oil, and fat clog pipes and sewer lines just as they block arteries. As with arteries, blocked sewer lines cause serious problems, eventually resulting in overflows and potentially causing health hazards, damage to home interiors, and adverse impacts to our environment. "Grease-clogged pipes have caused sewer spills on Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield – most particularly during the winter months with cooler temperatures and holiday cooking," states Tressa Rutland, the Directorate of Public Works' Prevention and Compliance Branch Chief.

Flushing grease down the drain can be disastrous! Clogged lines can cause raw sewage to overflow into your home or your neighbor's home, parks, yards, streets, ditches, streams, and other waterways. Cleaning up after such a mess is NOT how you want to spend your time! In mass, grease that makes it down the lines from several houses in a neighborhood can result in problems at the lift station once the grease hardens into large chunks. All this means problems for residents, and money for increased operation and maintenance of the sewer system and spill response teams.

The grease found in plumbing systems typically originates as a cooking by-product that has been washed down the kitchen sink. Meat fats, cooking oil, shortening, butter/margarine, food scraps, baking goods, sauces, and dairy products all contain grease and add to the problem once washed down the drain. Use of home garbage disposal units only shreds solid material into smaller pieces, but does not remove grease. Like arteries, grease will stick to the inside of the sewer pipes and will build up and block the lines over time.

According to Ms. Rutland, "a common mistake is to flush grease down the sink with hot water, because this will only push the grease farther down the lines where it will later re-solidify and clog lines. Commercial additives and chemicals, including soaps and detergents, that claim to dissolve grease may only do so temporarily and actually just push grease farther down the pipes. When the pipes get clogged it's only a matter of time before everything you put in them (bath water, dish water, and yes – sewage) backs up where it can cause problems both on and in your property and in the streets."

Some sewage spills can be prevented if grease, fats, and oils are kept out of the sewer system. You can do the following to help prevent future problems:

- Never pour fats, oils, or greases (especially bacon grease) down sink drains, toilets, street gutters, or storm drains.
- Pour into a container, seal, and place in the trash.
- Wipe pots, pans, and dishes with dry paper towels before rinsing or washing them; then throw away the paper towels.
- Spread the word by speaking with your family, friends, and neighbors about how to keep fats, oils, and greases out of sewers.

(Source: "Fat-Free Sewers: Prevent Fats, Oils, and Greases from Damaging Your Home and the Environment." Water Environment Federation.)

With your help, we can minimize the probability that you will be dealing with the unpleasant annoyance and inconvenience associated with sewage spills. Help us protect you, your property, and our environment. If you have any questions, please contact the Directorate of Public Works Environmental Division at (571) 801-0241.



Caption: Sewage spills caused by grease-clogged pipes.