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A Greasy Story

US Cities and towns are cracking down on commercial establishments that are dumping tons of grease into sewer lines annually. The taxpayers' cost of keeping sewers open is estimated at over \$25 billion per year.

This expensive mess has 75 percent of the already antiquated sewer systems in the United States working at half capacity because of clogs, according to an article in the Wall Street Journal. The increase in grease in sewer lines is a direct result of the phenomenal growth in dual-income households who choose to eat-out or take-out rather than cook at home.

According to the National Restaurant Association's 2001 Industry Forecast, total restaurant-industry sales have grown every year for the past 10 years and are projected to reach a record \$399 billion in 2001. This growth, combined with the chronic problems of measuring grease-to-sewer spillage, will continue to degrade our sewer systems. Industrial areas are also facing the problems of grease clogs in their main sewer lines because of various industry activities such as meat production and packing.

Grease clogs in a sewer line decrease the flow through the lines and dramatically compromise system performance. The problem is boundless, affecting urban and rural areas that are new and historic across the nation. On the East Coast, in Boston, a 300-foot-long, 36-inch diameter grease plug clogged the sewer line under the famous Faneuil Hall area.

In rural areas that rely on septic systems and in cities with sewers, regulators are responsible for managing local establishments that are major contributors to the grease problem. The primary challenge for these regulators is to develop effective programs and solutions that will ensure and document compliance with codes. Voluntary inspections every 30 days are required in some communities, but they are hard to enforce and infrequently completed.

Many municipalities are looking at a number of solutions, including mandatory pumping cycles, monitoring, and fines for offenders. Several cities are rewriting their codes to require the use of new technology as it becomes available. And some jurisdictions have reduced the amount of time between mandatory pumping cycles.

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In Atlanta, a new regulation calls for fines up to \$1,000 per day and a possible 60-day jail sentence or public works service.

And in St. Petersburg, Fla., a new ordinance is being written to provide an incentive for proactive oil and grease management. Restaurants will be required to pump their tanks every 30 days if they have a garbage disposal and every 60 days if they don't have a garbage disposal attached to their tanks — unless they receive a waiver from the city showing that they are maintaining proper tank levels. In addition, the city may advocate continuous monitoring at each location that will provide immediate and historical data on tank and trap performance and maintenance.

Pumpers are also a part of the problem. Some service providers do not properly pump tanks and traps when called in for service; they may just skim top grease and leave bottom solids. In some instances, grease and solids have been introduced into the tanks or sewer lines by pumpers unable to find places to dispose of their collected grease.

With more than 1 million commercial tanks in the United States and an estimated 28 million residential septic systems, the need for proper management has never been greater. Municipalities are looking for new ways to use proactive maintenance and monitoring to change the focus of their efforts from catching offenders to preventing problems.

Source: www.cenews.com/News.html

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