



Prevent Sewer Line Backups this Holiday Season



*Pipe clogged with fats, oil and grease.
Photo courtesy of City of Palo Alto.*

The holidays can take a toll on your home's plumbing system. There are typically more guests in the house, which means more showering, flushing, and washing that puts a strain on your household plumbing system. There are also rich, home-cooked meals that create a lot more fats, oils, and grease (FOG) than usual, which often get poured down the kitchen drain or garbage disposal.

FOG includes meat fats, dairy products, food scraps, cooking oils, sauces, dressings, sandwich spreads, gravies, marinades, dairy products, shortenings, lard, butter and margarine. FOG is a

major cause of sewer line backups and breaks and can create household plumbing disasters and unexpected expenses if not disposed of properly.

Overflows, backups, and spills are often caused by FOG that clogs sewer transmission lines. As a result, untreated wastewater or raw sewage can enter your home, a neighbor's home, local streets, and neighborhood parks. Or, the waste can enter a storm drain and flow directly into a local waterway, which can cause health hazards, create significant environmental damage and harm aquatic life due to bacteria, viruses and polluted materials that could be in the wastewater.

Sewer line backups and breaks are costly to repair for both homeowners and the City, and they are unpleasant to clean up. The following tips will assist you with managing household FOG to protect the environment, as well as the City's infrastructure, this holiday season and throughout the year.

General Tips

- Address existing plumbing problems before the holidays. If drains are already partially clogged, they may only get worse when the plumbing system is overwhelmed by heavy use.

Kitchen and Garbage Disposal Tips

- Never pour fats, oils, grease, food scraps or other cooking or household liquids down a drain. Even the smallest amounts of FOG can contribute to clogs and spills.
- Pour FOG into a heat resistant and sturdy non-recyclable container. For added safety, you can mix FOG with an absorbent material such as cat litter. Once the container is full and has cooled down, throw it out in the garbage. Since hot grease is dangerous to children and pets, you can freeze it first then toss in the garbage.
- Scrape grease and food scraps from dishes, pots, utensils, etc. into the trash before washing or putting them in the dishwasher. Dishwashers do not get rid of grease.
- Use sink strainer baskets to catch food and other waste and empty it into the garbage.
- Never rinse or flush FOG down the drain with hot water and/or dish soap. This does not dissolve grease. Since grease cools quickly, it does not travel very far before it hardens and sticks to sewer pipe walls.

Garbage Disposal Tips

- Never put stringy, fibrous, or starchy leftovers or food waste into the garbage disposal.
- Make sure the water is running before using the garbage disposal.
- Do not force food down the garbage disposal; put it in slowly.

Bathroom Tips

- Never pour fats, oils, grease, food scraps or other cooking or household liquids into a toilet. Even the smallest amounts of FOG can contribute to clogs and spills.
- Allow 10 minutes between showers if there are a lot of guests in the house to allow drains to clear.
- Never flush cotton balls, swabs, facial pads, rags or feminine hygiene products down the toilet. They do not dissolve.
- Keep curious children from flushing things down the toilet by putting childproof locks on cabinets.