



Frequently Asked Questions about Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) by Residents

What is FOG and what is the FOG Program?

FOG stands for Fats, Oils, and Grease. Basically, FOG is any combination of animal fats and/or vegetable oils that are used to prepare food or are found in food. The FOG Program is being implemented by the City of Dothan in order to monitor and reduce the amount of FOG that enters our sanitary wastewater system.

What is the difference between fats, oils, and grease?

I believe we know what fats are. Fats are highly specialized animal tissue deposited under the skin, around organs or deposited in the meat. On the other hand, the terms oils and grease are often used interchangeably, but they are very different substances. Oils, such as vegetable oil, never turn to a solid at room temperature. Grease is the solid white residue left over in the cooled pan after frying meat such as bacon.

What are the sources of FOG? Who produces FOG?

Common sources of FOG include meat fats, dairy products, food scraps, cooking oils, baked goods, sauces, dressings, sandwich spreads, gravies, marinades, dairy products, shortening, lard, butter, and margarine. FOG is produced basically by anyone who deals with food preparation, including many commercial sources as well as residential sources.

Why are fats, oils, and grease a problem?

FOG causes soap-like deposits to form on the homeowner's plumbing or the city's sanitary sewer lines, resulting in clogged pipes and usually expensive repairs. These blockages may also be accompanied by foul odors, significant property damage, and environmental harm in some cases.

Why are sanitary sewer overflows an important issue?

Sanitary sewer overflows (overflowing wastewater) releases bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens (disease causing organisms) that may be dangerous to human health. The wastewater may be released into your business or home, or into our waterways, streets, and parks. It is unpleasant and expensive to clean up, and if it occurs on private property, the property owner is responsible for the clean-up.

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How does FOG create a wastewater pipeline blockage or clogged pipes?

Fats, oils, and grease in a warm liquid form may appear to be harmless since they flow easily down the drain. However, as the liquid cools, the FOG separates from and floats on other liquids in the wastewater pipes. The layer of FOG undergoes chemical reactions to form a soap-like fatty acid compound which sticks to the wastewater pipes. Over time, the flow of wastewater becomes restricted and causes backups or sanitary sewer overflows, possibly in your home or yard.

What kind of problems can occur from a sewer line blockage in my neighborhood?

FOG gets into your sewer system from household drains, as well as from poorly maintained grease control equipment in restaurants and other businesses. Sanitary sewer lines blocked by FOG can cause major problems such as:

- Expensive and unpleasant clean-ups that you must pay for
- Sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) - raw sewage overflowing into neighborhood parks, yards, streets, backing up into your home or your neighbor's home
- Potential contact with disease-causing microorganisms resulting from the SSO
- An increase in operation and maintenance costs for Dothan Utilities

Can the City of Dothan determine where grease is coming from?

Yes. By checking manholes and using "Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)" inside wastewater pipes, the City can identify which sanitary service area and which specific building or neighborhood grease is coming from. If grease blockages are occurring frequently in a certain area, the City will make an effort to inform the residents in the area so that they can be more aware of their grease disposal methods and help fix the problem.

Is there a law against sanitary sewer overflows?

Yes. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Clean Water Act and Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) have regulations prohibiting wastewater discharges.

Should I use my garbage disposal?

Home garbage disposals do not keep grease out of your wastewater pipes. In fact, garbage disposals simply reduce the particle size of items that don't belong in the plumbing to start with by grinding the food containing fats, oils, and grease into smaller pieces before discharging into your plumbing to cause blockages. Food particles stick to the grease that clings to pipe walls and speed the blockage of pipes. Garbage disposals use water and electricity. Reduce or eliminate usage of garbage disposals to lower utility bills and lessen related plumbing blockages.

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Should I use lots of hot water and detergent to wash grease down the drain?

No. Hot water and products such as detergents or enzymes that claim to dissolve grease will simply cause a temporary emulsion and pass the grease down the pipeline, only to cause problems further down the line. When emulsified water and FOG enters your plumbing and cools downstream, the FOG separates and floats on the water's surface where it can cause blockages. In short, you remove the grease from your immediate vicinity only to help create a bigger problem downstream in your piping or the City's sanitary sewer.

Why should homeowners take the responsibility for making the water cleaner?

Our environment affects us all. Being good environmental stewards and preventing sanitary sewer overflows allows us all to live safer and healthier lives.

Isn't throwing containers full of grease into the landfill just creating a different problem?

Over time, fats, oils, and grease are very effectively biodegraded under landfill conditions. Very low levels of oils appear in water leached from landfills. Fats, oils, and grease cause greater environmental problems when they enter the wastewater system or surface waters.

What should I do if I experience a wastewater pipe blockage or overflow?

First, determine if the overflow of water is occurring when you are not discharging water through a fixture or appliance. If this is the case, call the City of Dothan at (334) 615-3302. A wastewater collections crew from Dothan Utilities will come and determine whether the blockage is on your property or City property. If the blockage is occurring on City property, the City will fix the problem. If the overflow is only occurring when you are discharging water through a fixture or appliance, the blockage is most likely on your property. If the blockage is on your property, you will have to hire a plumber to fix the problem.

Does the City of Dothan have a used cooking grease and oil recycling program?

No. The City of Dothan does not currently have a used cooking grease and oil recycling program, but is considering one. Many food service establishments will accept your used cooking grease and oil for recycling.

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What can I do to help?

The first line of defense and the easiest way to solve the FOG buildup problem in your community and help prevent sewerage overflows is by keeping this material out of the sewer system. Together we can help. Here are a few tips:

- Never pour grease down sink drains or into toilets.
- Scrape food scraps from trays, plates, pots, pans, bowls, utensils, grills and cooking surfaces into the garbage can for disposal.
- Wipe plates, pots, pans, bowls, utensils, etc. with paper towels prior to washing. Dispose of the paper towels into the garbage can.
- Recycle used cooking oil. Strain the crumbs from your used cooking oil and pour the oil into sturdy portable containers with lids. Dispose of the crumbs into the garbage can. The used cooking oil can then be recycled. The City of Dothan does not currently offer a used cooking oil recycle program. Many food service establishments that recycle waste cooking oil from fryers and other types of equipment may allow the transfer of your used cooking oil into their oil recycle bin.
- Do not mix petroleum products (used motor oils, etc.) with your used cooking oil. This will contaminate the used cooking oil, causing it not to be recyclable. The used motor oil can be saved and recycled separately by transferring it into petroleum recycle bins at repair shops that change motor oil. Motor oil is a hazardous waste and should never be put into the trash, poured down the drain or dumped on the ground. A single quart of motor oil can pollute 250,000 gallons of water.
- For smaller amounts of grease, let it solidify in the pan or in a jar, then throw the solid grease into the trashcan. Make sure to wipe the greasy pan or dish with a paper towel to soak up the rest. Salad dressings and sauces can be absorbed with a paper towel and tossed into the garbage. Try to get as much of the grease and oil as possible into the trash instead of the drain – just the little bit that washes out with the wastewater can cause problems over time. The cumulative impact could be substantial.
- Don't pour oils and grease down garbage disposals and do not use a garbage disposal to dispose of foods containing FOG. Preferably, do not use garbage disposals at all because even if you don't use them to dispose of FOG laden foods, the use of a food disposal will discharge solids into your plumbing and contribute to plumbing stoppages.
- Put baskets/strainers into sink drains to catch food scraps and other solids and empty the drain baskets/strainers into the trash for disposal.

- Communicate with your friends and neighbors about the problem of FOG in your sewer system and how to keep it out. The solution starts right in your home with your actions.

WASTEWATER POLLUTION IS SERIOUS!

Report sanitary sewer overflows by calling (334) 615 - 3302

For additional FOG related information, please call (334) 615 - 4454