

## IMPROPER WASTEWATER MAINTENANCE MAY MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION

Wastewater and Water Utility customers can make a significant impact upon proper operation of their wastewater service lines by what they dispose of down their household and floor drains. More importantly, what customers choose not to dispose of may be the action that prevents that lasting impression.

First, there are items that should not be placed in the sanitary wastewater systems. Most common of these substances is household grease. Cooking grease may be liquid when it comes off the stove but once it hits the wastewater service line it quickly turns into a thickened blob that sticks to the wastewater pipes and eventually clogs the service. Hardened grease also has a tendency to accumulate within the wastewater mains operated by the utility. Such an accumulation has the potential of affecting the property owner that dumped the grease into the wastewater system as well as adjoining property owners. A property owner only has to live through a backed up wastewater service once in a lifetime to remember that "lasting impression." To avoid this pitfall, never pour grease or cooking oils down a drain or down the toilet. Put hot grease into a dry metal container and allow it to cool. Then place the cooled grease into a trash container for proper disposal. To properly dispose of grease residue after cooking, scrape food wastes into a lined trash can, use a paper towel to wipe oil and grease from plates, pots and pans, and then discard the paper towels in the trash. Just these little proactive efforts can greatly diminish the odds of having a wastewater backup.

Other common items that should never be discarded in the wastewater system are paper towels, plastic products, feminine products, diapers or baby wipes only to mention a few. While most of these items are advertised as disposable, that generally means in the trash can, not the sanitary wastewater system.

Serious damage to a wastewater system can be realized through disposal of petroleum products. Not only do these products potentially damage the system, they are illegal to introduce into any sanitary system. The utility operates the wastewater treatment plant under strict federal and state wastewater guidelines listed in the operating permit and petroleum products in any quantity may violate the permits. In addition, the offender can face severe legal penalties when caught.

The above actions are pretty well known to most utility customers but there are other prohibited acts that often go unnoticed by the average property owner. Spring breakup in the Fairbanks area presents property owners with a dilemma about where to dispose of the water running off their roofs or from their parking lots. Roof drains and parking lots are prohibited from being diverted into the sanitary wastewater system at all times. Diversion of these sources of water from runoff or snow melt significantly increases the wastewater being treated at the wastewater treatment plant. During times of peak spring parking lot runoff or

roof drainage, increased water can even exceed the design capacity of the treatment plant. In extreme cases the treatment plant can actually be flooded which prevents effective treatment of the wastewater. This unnecessary demand increases the cost of chemically treating and pumping what is essentially storm water. To properly dispose of this runoff, it should be diverted into a storm water grate or to grassed areas, never to a sanitary wastewater manhole or wastewater cleanout.

In spite of the best design and operating procedures, wastewater service lines that are constructed below or near the elevation of the utility's wastewater structures may experience a backup. The Uniform Plumbing Code, Fairbanks City Ordinance and the Utility's Tariff all require a check valve or backflow prevention device be installed to prevent wastewater from backing up into below grade property such as basements. For buildings that are constructed with below ground drains or fixtures the prudent measures may include installation of a backflow valve or other similar device. The devices are particularly important when considering that most standard homeowners' insurance policies exclude damage resulting from wastewater backups. Therefore, a separate policy or policy provision may be required to protect the homeowner from unnecessary risk and cost if a backup occurs.

These tidbits of information may help you to properly maintain and operate your sanitary wastewater system and avoid that "**lasting impression**" that all of us wish to avoid.

Brought to you as a service by Golden Heart Utilities and College Utilities Corporation, your local water and wastewater companies.