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City of Long Beach, City Auditor



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Healthy Sewers, Healthy Long Beach

Using fats, oils and grease (in moderation, of course) can add a little flavor and flare to make any dish tastier. However, did you know that pouring those left-over fats, oils and grease (FOG) down the drain after cooking those savory Brussels sprouts with bacon or that yummy deep-fried turkey can have a direct negative impact not only on the plumbing in your home but also on our streets and public health?

This is because incorrectly disposing of FOG can cause sewer lines to clog and then overflow. When FOG is poured down your sink or drain, it quickly cools and congeals. This causes buildups or stoppages in lateral lines and even the main sewer lines which then lead to overflows. These sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) occur when sewage is discharged into the environment. The potential adverse impacts of SSOs include environmental damage, public health risks, and damage to property.

As clean neighborhoods and public health are important quality of life issues, my Office recently conducted an audit of the Long Beach Water Department's operations on 712 miles of sewer lines. We found that the City needs to align its SSO prevention activities to its goal of reducing SSOs. As 71% of the City's SSOs were caused by FOG and the majority of those, 64%, were linked to residential properties, we made audit recommendations that the Water Department's outreach efforts focus on how we, as residents, have a role in preventing FOG-related SSOs.

- Do not pour any greasy food or oils down the garbage disposal, toilet or any other drain. This includes all meat fats, lard, cooking oil, sauces, butter, and margarine.
- Cool and/or solidify all fats, oils and grease before disposing of them.
- Dispose of the cooled FOG properly – in the trash only and never in any drain (including toilets).
- Scrape all food and FOG off of plates, pots and pans and into the trash before dishwashing.

We can all do our part in keeping sewer lines clear and flowing properly. Ultimately, this will keep our environment including our streets, lively neighborhoods, and beautiful beaches healthy and clean.