



INFRAMARK

CUSTOMER FIRST NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2020

GREASE AND WIPES: THE "BAD BOYS" OF PLUMBING

WHY THEY ARE A PROBLEM

The last thing we want to do is clog our plumbing and have sewage in our house. Yet, when we put the wrong things down a drain or in our toilets, we can create serious problems. We have all read about children's toys and personal sanitary items found in sewer lines, but the major "bad boys" are coagulated grease and cleaning wipes.

Typically, hot water is used to clean greasy items since grease will temporarily become soluble with hot water. After the grease cools, it will coagulate and begin to build in the sewer line. Over time, grease can build up and when combined with cleaning wipes that are flushed down the toilet, the result is an obstruction or even a total blockage of the sewer line. Grease should never be poured down the sink. It should be poured into a container. Cooking utensils should be wiped clean of any grease with a paper towel before washing in the sink.

When your main sewer line gets blocked, there is potential for the water to back up and overflow into the house. Some of us have experienced grease clogged kitchen plumbing causing the water to back up into the sink. Usually, a plumber is called, and they use a mechanical rodder, (roto rooter) to clear the line. The danger is not just from the line in your kitchen sink. The main sewer line from your house can become blocked with grease and wipes. Partially blocked lines in any part of the wastewater collection system in a house can cause great damage.

WARNING SIGNS

How can you tell if you have a blockage or clogging of your main sewer line? When your sink gets clogged, it is easy to tell. The water does not drain and it is time to call a plumber. But what if it is your main line into the arterial sewer system? If you have a clog, you may notice strange sounds or changes in how the water drains. For instance, you might flush the toilet and notice water backing up into the bathroom tub or shower. Since the flushed water cannot enter the sewer, it flows up the pipes and exits at the most convenient point. A key sign of a clogged main sewer drain is when multiple plumbing fixtures are backing up at the same time; the most common place is the toilet.

The best way to tell if you have a blockage in your wastewater collection system is to check your cleanout. The cleanout is usually a 4" round white or rectangular cap located outside your home. The purpose of the cleanout is to give plumbers direct access to identify and clear any blockages. You should remove the cap and check for standing water. If water is standing in the pipe, it is a good indication that your main sewer line is clogged. If the home main line is clogged, it is the homeowner's responsibility to clear.

FATBERGS

An even bigger issue for you and your neighborhood is when all the grease, wipes and other debris accumulate in the arterial sewer lines that serve the district. Then, it is not just your house, but the entire neighborhood that can have wastewater in the home.

If the obstruction is not in your main line and it is in the arterial line, it is the District's responsibility to clean it out. We will come out and investigate and determine the most advantageous method to clear the blockage and get things flowing again.

You may have seen large sanitary sewer pipes being installed and assume that they are just too big to get clogged. Believe it or not, they can get clogged. On January 8, 2019 in the English town of Sidmouth in Devon, South West Water reported finding what they called a "Fatberg" obstructing a major sewer line. It measured 210 feet long, making it longer than the Leaning Tower of Pisa and 42 feet longer than the White House. That was not an isolated incident. In 2017 in London's East End, a 130 ton fatberg was found and it took weeks to clear.

The fatbergs are created by the accumulation of oil, grease, personal sanitary items, and wipes from hundreds, if not thousands of homes. The proper disposal of grease, oils, fats and other items is critical not only for the homeowner, but for the entire neighborhood.

You can help by not letting grease or oil go into the sewer line or flushing wipes down the toilet. Free flowing pipes can make for a much better day -- both for you and your wastewater treatment system.

On behalf of the Texas MUD Leadership Team

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