



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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This Thanksgiving, put your pipes on a fat-free diet

As turkey day dinners are served across tables throughout Cook County, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) encourages the public to think before disposing of fats, oils and grease this Thanksgiving.

Known as FOG, these fats, oils and grease can create challenges for wastewater systems. Butter, cooking oil, meat drippings and other substances are often dumped down drains and toilets leading to clogged pipes, taxed collection systems and overburdened treatment plants working to transform the remnants of holiday wastewater into clean water.

"Scraps of fats, oils, greases and leftovers can wreak havoc when sent down pipes to flow to treatment plants," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Just like the arteries that keep our blood flowing, the network of pipes that lead to our water reclamation plants takes considerable maintenance. We urge the 5.25 million residents we serve to help us protect our water environment."

Working with its partners at the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), the MWRD reminds households that several items can pose a challenge to pipes. In addition to FOG, these items should also not be put down household drains or toilets:

- Butter/margarine
- Food scraps
- Lard/shortening
- Meat fats
- Dressings and sauces

"The impact of putting FOG down the drain are devastating to the most vulnerable areas within our wastewater collection and treatment systems. Our sewer pipes and pumps cannot function as intended when these items are improperly disposed," says NACWA CEO Adam Krantz. "Think of it like a heart – putting bad stuff in clogs up arteries, eventually leading to serious health issues which we could avoid by keeping the bad stuff out of the system in the first place."

This holiday season, the MWRD, NACWA and its membership of nearly 1,100 publicly-owned treatment works encourage the public to refrain from improperly disposing of



Fats, oils and greases poured down drains flow to the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant, where the water will be treated and cleaned. The MWRD urges Thanksgiving cooks to think about what they're sending down the pipes.

these items and to instead do the following:

- Pour fats, oils and greases into a covered container such as a used jar or can.
- Allow it to cool, either leaving it out or storing it in the freezer until it hardens.
- Dispose of items in the trash.
- Use a paper towel to wipe greasy pots and pans before washing them.
- Utilize sink strainers to catch food waste.
- When possible, put food scraps in a compost bin.

NACWA also suggests that properly disposing of FOG is one of the best ways that utilities can reduce the number of fatbergs. A fatberg is a term used to describe a massive, impenetrable collection of non-flushable and "flushable" materials combined with insoluble fats, oils and grease that build up in sewer pipes. The MWRD and local municipal sewers have avoided fatbergs in the Chicago area, but these masses have obstructed pipes and have led to sewer overflows and backups in other parts of the country. According to NACWA, it is estimated these fatbergs cost U.S. utilities up to \$1 billion annually.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrdd.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.