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WOODLANDS DIVISION

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Fat, Oil, and Grease (FOG) Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q. Who is San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA)?

A. San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) is one of 10 major river authorities in Texas created in 1937 by the Texas Legislature. SJRA has four operating divisions: Woodlands, Lake Conroe, Groundwater Reduction Plan (GRP), and Highlands.

The Woodlands Division provides wholesale water supply and wastewater treatment services to the municipal utility districts (Customer Districts) located in The Woodlands, Texas.

Q. What is FOG and where does it come from?

A. FOG comes from many sources and typically enters the sewer system through kitchen sinks and dishwashers. Grease is a byproduct of cooking and is found in a variety of things such as: meat, lard, cooking oil, shortening, butter & margarine, food scraps, baking goods, sauces, dairy products, etc. These products are washed down the drain and into sewer pipes.

Q. What can be done to help reduce FOG problems in the sewer pipes?

A. The only way to keep FOG out of the sewer pipes and prevent overflows is to keep the material out of the sewer in the first place. There are several ways to accomplish this:

- Don't pour grease down sink drains. Pour used grease into sealable containers and dispose of the containers accordingly.
- Scrape grease and food waste into the trashcan for disposal.
- Limit use of in-sink garbage disposals. These allow the grease laden food scraps to move further into the sewer system where they still can cause problems.
- Dry wipe greasy cookware prior to cleaning.
- Clean and maintain commercial grease traps/interceptors frequently.
- Talk to your friends and neighbors about FOG and encourage them to help keep it out of the sewer system.

FOG Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) - Continued

Q. Why do food service establishments need grease trap/interceptor?

A. Grease traps and interceptors allow grease to separate and collect in a chamber and the water to flow past grease trap/interceptor. Grease trap/interceptor equipment is standardized by the Local Plumbing Code (City of Houston Plumbing Code), Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC) or other approved and appropriate Plumbing Codes for commercial food handling businesses and is required by SJRA.

Q. What is the difference between a grease trap and a grease interceptor?

A. Both devices do the same thing, separating and retaining free floating oils and greases. Small, in-floor or under-sink prefabricated units are most often referred as grease traps. Grease interceptors are the larger units located outdoors that offer much longer hydraulic retention times. The term 'Interceptor' and 'Trap' may be used interchangeably and can be referred as grease trap/ interceptor.

Q. How do I know what size grease traps or interceptor is right for my business?

A. New Facilities: Food service facilities which are newly proposed or constructed, or existing facilities which will be expanded or renovated to include a food service facility, where such facility did not previously exist, shall be required to design, install, operate and maintain a grease trap/interceptor in accordance with the SJRA Grease Trap Sizing Criteria, Local Plumbing Code (City of Houston Plumbing Code), UPC or other approved and appropriate Plumbing Codes. Existing Facilities: Existing grease traps/interceptors must be operated and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations and in accordance with the SJRA Grease Order.

Q. Can I get a waiver of the requirement to install an interceptor/trap

A. No. When baking and/or other similar cooking processes are used during food preparation at food service establishments that do not generate significant amount of FOG as to cause interference with the SJRA collection and treatment system, a small under-sink or in-floor grease trap can be used instead of a full-size exterior in-ground grease interceptor.

Q. What happens if I remodel orsell my business?

If you sell or remodel your business a reassessment of the grease removal equipment will be conducted under SJRA's Grease Program. Remodels requiring a building permit are required to reassess the sizing matrix of the existing interceptor following SJRA's Grease Trap Sizing Criteria, Local Plumbing Code (City of Houston Plumbing Code), UPC or other approved and appropriate Plumbing Codes.

FOG Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) - Continued

Q. Which kitchen fixtures should I connect to the interceptor and trap and are there any that should not be connected?

A. All grease bearing waste streams should be routed through an appropriate grease trap/interceptor, including: three-compartment sinks, pot/pan sinks, soup kettles, hand-washing sinks, dishwashers, mop sinks and floor drains. Drains that receive “clear waste” only, such as from ice machines, condensate from coils and drink stations, may be plumbed to the sanitary system without passing through the grease interceptor. No toilet/bathroom wastes are allowed to be connected through the grease interceptor.

R. How do I properly clean a grease trap?

A. For small under-sink or in-floor traps:

1. Bail out any water in the trap to facilitate cleaning.
2. Dip the accumulated grease out of the trap and deposit in a leak proof, sealable, and water-tight container.
3. Remove baffles if possible.
4. Scrape the sides, the lid, and the baffles with a putty knife to remove as much of the grease as possible and deposit the grease into a watertight container.
5. Remove solids from the bottom with a strainer or similar device.
6. Replace the baffle and the lid.
7. Record the volume of grease removed.
8. Contact a waste hauler or recycler for grease pick-up.

For large exterior in-ground interceptor: You will need to hire a TCEQ licensed grease hauler.

WARNING! Do not flush with hot water or use drain cleaners, acids, caustics, solvents, enzymes, bacteria, or emulsifying agents when cleaning grease traps and interceptors. These actions do not remove grease. They only allow it to pass deeper into the sewer pipes where it becomes more costly and difficult to remove.

Q. How often does the grease trap need to be cleaned?

A. For most under-sink grease traps, weekly cleaning is needed. Larger in-ground grease interceptors are required to be cleaned (pumped) a minimum of every ninety (90) days unless otherwise approved by SJRA. However, the actual pumping frequency of an interceptor will vary based on the type of establishment it serves. Any person who owns or operates a trap, interceptor, or separator may submit, to SJRA, a request in writing for a variance to the ninety (90) day pumping frequency of their trap/interceptor, or separator.

FOG Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) - Continued

Q. What other businesses have to install wastewater pretreatment?

A. Car wash and automobile repair businesses are required to have a Sand/Oil/Water separator. Photographic developers, doctor's offices, and dental offices are required to have a silver recovery system and amalgam separator. Dry cleaners are required to have a solvent recovery system. Washateria facilities are required to have a lint trap. Hair traps are required for beauty salons, barber shops, pet grooming facilities, hospitals or wherever hair clogging is a potential problem.

Q. Can I clean my own grease trap?

A. Food Services establishment users may clean their own trap provided they receive written approval from SJRA annually, and the trap is no more than fifty (50) gallons in liquid/operating capacity.

Q. Do I need to use SJRA registered waste hauler to clean my grease interceptor?

A. Yes, all waste haulers must be licensed with the TCEQ.

Q. Do I need to send grease trap/interceptor cleaning waste manifest to SJRA?

A. Yes, a copy of each manifest returned to the waste generator (FSE) shall be sent to SJRA by the waste generator via fax, email, or mail.

Q. How long am I required to retain Waste Manifests?

A. Copies of waste manifest returned to the waste generator shall be retained for five (5) years and be readily available for review by SJRA or other local authorities.

Q. Does a Food Services Establishment need to establish a training system?

A. Yes. Users required maintaining traps, interceptors, or separators, shall establish a system of training designed to provide employees with appropriate instruction on the proper use and maintenance of such facilities. Training sessions shall be conducted annually to ensure that employees understand the essential elements of the system. New employees shall be trained immediately upon employment. All training must be documented.

Q. What is strong waste?

A. Strong waste is a term generally applied to the relative strength of a commercial or industrial liquid waste that is discharged into the sewer system. If the discharge exceeds 200 mg/l BOD or 220 mg/l TSS it is considered to be a strong waste.

FOG Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) - Continued**Q. How can I reduce my surcharge?**

A. The surcharge is based on multiple components; flow, BOD concentration and TSS concentration. Reduce any or all of these components and your surcharge will be reduced. Conserving water is a quick and simple way to reduce your surcharge. In addition, the strength of wastewater (BOD and TSS concentrations) can be reduced in many ways. The easiest way is to examine your housekeeping practices and take note of what is put down the drain. BOD and TSS surcharges may be reduced by minimizing discharges of the following:

- Milk and dairy products
- Dough products
- Sugar
- Alcohol
- FOG
- Cleaning chemicals

Disposal of these types of materials into trashcans and garbage dumpsters will help reduce your surcharge and help SJRA maintain the sewer system. In addition, use or overuse of in-sink garbage disposals and poor maintenance of grease traps/interceptors can result in a high surcharge.

Q. What if I fail to clean my grease trap?

A. A user shall have any trap, interceptor, or separator cleaned when ordered to do so by SJRA. Failure to have the unit cleaned by the deadline specified by SJRA shall cause for enforcement action and SJRA may precipitate the cleaning and bill the user for such costs, plus any additional costs incurred by SJRA.

Q. Who will bear the costs for sampling and laboratory analysis?

A. Where SJRA must perform sampling for investigative purposes and finds a user negligent in complying with the Grease Order, the costs of such sampling shall be borne by the user.