



## Frequent Questions Regarding FOG



### **What is FOG and why should I care?**

FOG refers to fats, oil and grease that are generated from normal business operations of food service establishments (FSEs). Common examples of FOG include: milk, ice cream, coffee creamers, sauces, pan drippings, butter, icing, food particles, etc. FOG is commonly washed into the plumbing system during food prep or clean-up through the kitchen sink. As it travels, it congeals and decreases pipe capacity both inside the FSE and in the main sewer system. FOG can block your drain, your neighbors' drain and main collection lines, potentially becoming an environmental and public health risk.

Eliminating FOG-related sanitary sewer overflows is the goal of the new WRA FOG program. FOG Inspectors will routinely inspect kitchens and FSEs to ensure compliance with regulations. It is the responsibility of each business to develop an effective FOG waste management plan and properly dispose of FOG waste on a consistent basis.

### **What types of facilities are required to meet the directives of the new ordinance?**

All commercial and institutional cooking establishments as well as some non-cooking FSEs will be required to meet the regulations set forth in the ordinance. This includes all locations with a State of Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals Food License. Locations such as, but not limited to, restaurants, bars, schools, daycares, churches, nursing homes, bakeries, grocery stores, caterers and other food preparation operations.

### **Will my existing grease trap (indoor, under the sink unit) be sufficient to comply with the new ordinance?**

A grease trap that is properly sized and installed to remove the FOG at your FSE is important. Following the suggested best management practices (BMPs) and routine maintenance of the trap will increase the probability of meeting the discharge limits of the ordinance. Indoor grease traps are much smaller in design and therefore need more maintenance to prevent the FOG from reaching the sanitary sewers. Make sure baffles and deflector shields are installed properly. The WRA also recommends that dishwashers and garbage disposals by-pass small, indoor grease traps as the FOG is emulsified by the detergents, sending it on down the sanitary sewers. If the trap is not cleaned frequently or correctly it will not perform well and could put your FSE at risk of violating FOG discharge limits.

### **How often does my grease interceptor or grease trap need to be maintained (also see *Understanding the 25% Rule* handout)?**

There is a *25% rule* that applies to both grease interceptors and grease traps that states the FOG (floats to the top) and solids (settles to the bottom) content of the device should not be in excess of 25% of the liquid operating depth. Typically, cleaning frequencies for grease traps may be in the range of daily to weekly. Cleaning frequencies for grease interceptors can be expected to be monthly to quarterly.

This 25% rule allows the wastewater enough residence time inside the device to effectively remove the FOG and solids from the wastewater before it reaches the sanitary sewer collection system. The single most important thing you can do to help extend the length of time between maintenance and save your facility in maintenance expense, is to use diligence in dry clean-up prior to wet clean-up. Scrape food debris in the garbage and dry-wipe the dishes prior to immersion in hot water (sink or dishwasher).

Des Moines Metro Wastewater Reclamation Authority  
3000 Vandalia Road  
Des Moines, IA 50317  
(515) 323-8000



## Frequent Questions Regarding FOG



### **May I use chemicals, enzymes or bacteria in my grease removal device or in my drains?**

The City Ordinance prohibits the use of enzymes, emulsifying chemicals, hot water or other agents as a grease abatement method to grease removal devices or drains. These chemicals keep the FOG emulsified long enough to become a serious problem downstream as dilution of the chemical allows for the FOG to congeal and decrease pipe capacity, having the potential to cause a serious blockage and sanitary sewer overflow.

### **What are the most important things for me, the business owner or operator, to know about the FOG Program?**

The WRA will be performing unscheduled compliance inspections. The important items the WRA will be checking are:

1. The grease removal device (interior grease trap or exterior grease interceptor) is under 25% full of FOG and solids. This will be done via physical inspection by the WRA Inspector.
2. Maintenance records, including accurate measurements, are on-site and available at the request of the inspector.
3. Any additional *requirements* from the official inspection report.

### **What are the enforcement action(s) that could potentially occur if the regulations of the FOG Program are not met by my business?**

Enforcement actions could include, but are not limited to, notice of violation without fine; notice of violation with fines of \$100 or \$200; civil penalties; submission of a compliance plan; installation of a properly sized, exterior grease interceptor; and clean-up costs for sewer blockages.

### **Is there a FOG inspection fee?**

Per City Ordinance, the WRA currently charges a \$50.00 inspection fee. Generally, this will occur approximately yearly if your food service establishment is in compliance. An invoice will be sent to you following the inspection.

Des Moines Metro Wastewater Reclamation Authority  
3000 Vandalia Road  
Des Moines, IA 50317  
(515) 323-8000