

Grease FAQs

What is grease?

Grease is the common term for animal fats and vegetable oils. Animal fats and vegetable oils are lipids. Lipids are organic molecules essential to animal life for the production of hormones and energy storage. If a lipid is liquid at room temperature, it is usually referred to as “oil”. If it is solid at room temperature, the lipid is referred to as “fat” or “grease”. Animal fats and vegetable oils are 8-12% lighter than water and do not mix with water, preferring to form a separate layer on water. This floating, but separate from water property enables free-floating fats and oils to be easily separated by grease traps and grease separators.

Where does grease come from?

Grease comes from residential, commercial and industrial sources. Residential sources are homes, apartments, condos, home daycares and home catering facilities. Commercial and industrial sources include automotive service centers, restaurants, medical facilities, religious facilities, educational facilities, correctional institutions, airports, food processing plants and manufacturing plants and other industries.

How does grease cause problems?

Greases are poured into the sewer system as a liquid and solidify downstream during cooling; the grease sticks to the walls of drainage pipes in buildings and ONWASA sewer pipe. Over a period of time a building’s internal drain lines or a sewer pipe’s diameter is significantly reduced by grease/solid buildup. This buildup can reduce or stop the flow of water through the pipes causing backups or sewer overflows. Grease can also cause lift station failures. It can cause increased grease loading, increased Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) and scum disposal problems at wastewater treatment plants. More than 50% of sewer overflows are caused by grease.

What is a sewer overflow?

Overflows are sewage spills that occur when sanitary sewer collection pipes are blocked or restricted, causing wastewater to back up the pipe and flow out through manholes. Most overflows are relatively small and can be stopped and cleaned up quickly. If left unattended, overflows can result in property damage, foul odors, environmental problems and fish kills. In a worst-case scenario, they can create public health and safety hazards.

Why shouldn't I just pour used cooking oil down the drain?

Cooking oil and grease poured down drains can build up in pipes causing backups at home, into streets and the storm drain system. Proper disposal of your cooking oil and other greases and fats will help prevent a sewage backup in your home. Overflows can pose health and environmental hazards, polluting local creeks and waterways.

What about using my garbage disposal, hot water or detergent to wash grease down the drain?

These won't prevent grease from building up in sewer pipes. Home garbage disposals do not remove grease from the plumbing system. Hot water will cool down in pipes causing fats and grease to coagulate. Detergents that claim to dissolve grease may cause blockages to occur further down the pipeline.