

Staff Report

Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG)

May 24, 2011

Fats, oils, and grease are commonly referred to in the wastewater industry as FOG. Numerous kitchen activities and food waste contribute to the FOG problem, including, but not limited to, meat grilling, meat roasting, frying, and use of butter and butter by-products, icings, gravies, and other sauces. FOG accumulates in the sanitary sewer system by collecting on pipe joints. These wastes solidify inside the pipes and collect in manholes. As FOG accumulates, it restricts or even blocks flows through a pipe. The blockages lead to sewer backups in buildings or as sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs).

Federal regulations require municipal wastewater utilities to properly manage, operate, and maintain their sewer collection systems (40 CFR 122.41(e)). EPA has the authority to cite a utility for a violation of the Clean Water Act when a sewer becomes clogged and overflows, with penalties of up to \$32,500 per episode. It is because of the enforcement actions and potential for very expensive fines that many utilities are developing specific FOG ordinances. Ames is just beginning this process.

While the Water and Pollution Control Department is just beginning to evaluate options to resolve FOG problems, FOG has been a problem in Ames' sewers for many years. Staff members have been educating themselves about FOG problems, starting with attendance at a national FOG workshop in March 2008. The education was an important step in order to hold more effective and productive discussions with community members on how to solve problems related to FOG.

On October 20 and 21, 2010, two meetings were held with representatives from food service establishments (FSEs). These meetings were used to describe problems in the sewer system as a result of FOG and to learn about problems the FSEs have with FOG. Although the number of attendees at each meeting was small, the participants represented a wide array of FSE types—from full-service, sit-down to carry-out/fast food. Both meetings had good participation and productive discussions between the FSE representatives and city staff. It was encouraging to note that the participants were strong proponents of developing some type of a FOG program.