



On the Water Front

December 2022 | A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

Avoid holiday clog and watch what goes down drain

'Tis the season of cooking, baking and merrymaking, and El Paso Water would like to share a few reminders as El Paso celebrates the holidays.

As we kick off the merriment, we ask our customers to dispose of any fats, oils or greases (FOG) in your trash can. Sending FOG down your drain can clog pipes and cause wastewater backup in your home, ruining what's left of any holiday festivities.

Danger of FOG

We see FOG damage year-round but especially this time of year, as El Paso families celebrate the season with border favorites such as tamales and menudo. More than 80% of wastewater blockages are attributed to grease or a combination of grease and other materials.

The smallest amount of FOG clings to pipes and builds up, clogging the wastewater system and causing unnecessary costly damage that could have been avoided. FOG solidifies once it cools and can affect neighboring wastewater lines.

In 2005, EPWater implemented a FOG program to address blockages and ensure that FOG is managed correctly. The program has contributed to a 78% reduction in the number of blockages, and a 59% reduction in overflows.

Our employees can attest to the considerable harm wrought by FOG and other debris that they have been battling steadily since the pandemic began. We rarely see masks in the system nowadays, but other unflushable items persist.

Last month, our crews removed a large blockage near the border that resulted in wastewater overflow to the nearby riverbed. A mass of wipes and rags caused the manhole to leak wastewater. Although water and wastewater services were not affected, the incident serves as a reminder to be aware of what we put down the drain.

In the bathroom

During the holiday season, houses are often full of company and bathroom traffic flow is sure to increase. Make sure your guests only flush the three P's (pee, poop and toilet paper). Regardless of what the label says, wipes are **not** flushable and do **not** dissolve in water. They result in severe blockages and destroy the pumps in our wastewater system. Our crews have stepped up operations on weekends to remove excessive wipes and rags from our wastewater lift stations, resulting in about 30 extra hours weekly.

Our wastewater plant employees also frequently report an excess of foreign debris in their filtering systems. Aside from rags and wipes, plastics and construction materials often end up in bar screens. Common household items, such as dental floss, cotton swabs and personal products, also catch in pipes and clog.

Aside from the three P's, please help us to prevent unflushable items from getting into our wastewater system to avoid costly damages to your home, neighborhood and environment. Keeping contaminants out ensures a wastewater system that can function properly.

Happy holidays from El Paso Water!



Wipes and rags are removed at the Haskell Wastewater Treatment Plant.



Pretreatment Inspector Supervisor Kyle Eckert documents a local bakery's grease trap, with the assistance of Pretreatment Inspector Luis Velasquez.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water. Contact Christina Montoya at 915.594.5596 or cmontoya@epwater.org with any comments or questions.

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