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Press Release

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HOLIDAY DINNERS STICK TO YOUR RIBS AND YOUR PIPES

Keep your plumbing and public sewers free from blockages and overflows by properly disposing of fats, oils and grease this holiday season and in the coming new year

October XX, 2002 –A southern-style deep-fried Thanksgiving turkey. Gravy drippings. Onions sautéed in butter or oil to make the perfect stuffing. Rich eggnog. All mouth-watering holiday traditions, but most homeowners may be surprised to learn that pouring the remains of these culinary delights down the kitchen sink can cause costly, unpleasant sewer blockages and overflows.

Data gathered by sanitary sewer agencies in the region indicate, on average, one in sixty homes are affected by a blockage in their plumbing or the main lines of the public sewer system every year. These blockages can and do sometimes cause overflows into homes. Although tree roots are the number one cause of sewer blockages and overflows, grease from residences and restaurants is also a main contributor.

What happens is pretty simple: fats, oil and grease build up in pipes and cause problems. All year long, people pour byproducts of cooking down their sink drain. During the holiday season, it is expected that larger quantities of these fats will make their way to the sanitary sewer system via the kitchen sink.

"You never think that the turkey dinner or the batch of french fries you make-will affect anything other than your waste line," says Phil Bobel of the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies (BACWA). "Just as excess fat isn't good for our health, it isn't good for our sewer system. In fact, over time the build-up can block an entire pipe."

Sewer blockages and overflows can be very unpleasant. Besides the mess, untreated sewage can cause health hazards and threaten the environment. Overflows can also require expensive cleanup. Sometimes residents end up paying for these cleanups directly, but even when your local city or sewer agency does the cleanup, residents end up paying higher sewer bills due to clean-up costs.

"This is a problem homeowners can help to prevent if they take some simple steps to reduce the amount of fats, oil and grease that enters their pipes," says Bobel. "The holiday season is a good time to start making changes that will carry into the New Year."

Here are just a few simple tips from the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies:

- Do not put dairy products, fats, oil, grease or greasy foods down the garbage disposal or drain.
- Freeze small amounts of fats, oils and grease in a container with a tight-sealing lid and dispose of it in a trash receptacle.
- Mix cooking oil with an absorbent material such as cat litter or coffee grounds, place it in a lidded container and dispose of it in a trash receptacle.
- For greasy pans that need to be soaked, first pour off the grease into a container as mentioned above. Then place a paper towel over the drain basket to catch grease and food particles as you pour the soaking water down the drain.
- For large quantities of cooking oil and other fats, call your local household hazardous waste collection facility or sewage treatment plant for guidance on disposal.

For more information on how to prevent fats, oils, and grease from damaging your home and the environment go on-line to www.wef.org/publicinfo/FactSheets/fatfree.jhtml for a copy of "Fat-Free Sewers."