

## Company fined dumping grease into Tacoma storm drain

Olympia, WA - November 3, 2005

Metro Rooter and Plumbing has been fined \$10,000 by the state Ecology Department because one of its employees dumped approximately 4,000 gallons of kitchen grease and waste water into a Tacoma-area storm drain.

The company was also sent a bill for \$20,000 to repay the state's cleanup costs.

Storm drains are considered state waters because they drain into wetlands, rivers, lakes and Puget Sound, according to David Byers, a manager with Ecology's spill-response program.

The mysterious mass of slimy, smelly goo first appeared in a stormwater swale near Blix Elementary off East 38th Street in January 2004. A joint investigation by the city of Tacoma and Ecology identified the substance, then traced its source to a storm-drain manhole at Sheridan Elementary, 16 blocks away.

It was later learned that Metro Rooter and Plumbing had been hired by the Tacoma School District to clean kitchen grease out of its school's grease interceptors.

After Ecology issued the company a notice of violation for the incident, Ecology learned from the company that a former employee had dumped the grease down the storm drain manhole near Sheridan Elementary.

The Ecology/Tacoma investigation prompted a federal criminal investigation that resulted in several felony and misdemeanor charges against the company and company officials.

Restaurants and other businesses routinely hire septic haulers, who must be certified by local health departments to handle grease waste. Septic haulers are required to take the grease waste to a wastewater treatment plant or to a licensed septage-treatment or biosolids-recycling facility.

"Commercial kitchen grease needs to be properly disposed of or recycled at an approved facility, not poured into the storm drain," Byers said. "This was a costly mess that never should have happened."

Separately, the city of Tacoma billed the company approximately \$19,000 for its share of the cleanup costs.

"The company has voluntarily accepted responsibility for all clean up costs," said Ivan Karmel, the company's attorney and spokesman. "The company performed its own investigation and determined that one of its employees had disregarded the directives of the company by improperly disposing of the grease trap wastes into the storm water system. The employee was promptly discharged and the company implemented a compliance plan to ensure that similar incidents would not take place in the future. Company policy is and will continue to be to safeguard the environment."

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Ecology's Web site: [Washington State Department of Ecology](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/) http://www.ecy.wa.gov/

Broadcast version Metro Rooter and Plumbing has been fined \$10,000 by the state Ecology Department for dumping approximately 4,000 gallons of kitchen grease and waste water into a Tacoma-area storm drain.

The company also got an eighteen-thousand dollar bill to repay the state's cleanup costs.

Storm drains are considered state waters because they drain into wetlands, rivers, lakes and Puget Sound, Ecology says.

Kitchen grease must be taken to an approved facility, not poured down the storm drain, according to the Department of Ecology.