

## Grease Causes Sewage Spills at Orange County Beaches

Three years after sewage spills caused a record number of beach closures in Orange County, cities and sanitation agencies are targeting grease.

Cities in much of the county are under the gun to meet a Dec. 30 deadline that bans restaurant owners and others from pouring cooking grease down the drain, where it can block pipes and send sewage into the ocean. From Yorba Linda to Newport Beach, 32 cities and water agencies in north and central Orange County are requiring restaurants, school cafeterias and hospitals — considered the biggest grease producers — to stop using garbage disposals and instead mop leftover food residue and oil into trashcans. Large grease producers may have to install subterranean interceptor tanks to filter fats and oils out of wastewater.

The aim is to eliminate the whitish goo that clings to the sides of sewer pipes, restricting water flow and eventually causing blockages and spills. Most of the beach closures are the result of contamination from sewage spills that flow into the ocean, either from drains or waterways. Beach closures are a financial hardship for coastal cities, emptying boardwalks and beachfront businesses after county health officials find poor water quality. In 1999, the water off Huntington Beach became so contaminated that miles of shoreline had to be closed during the height of summer.

Since Orange County suffered 51 beach closures in 2001, the yearly number has been cut in half. So far this year, there have been 25 closures, according to Orange County Health Care Agency records. Some restaurant owners, however, think cities are targeting the wrong crowd. "We've been trained decades upon decades to keep grease from going down the drain," said Dan Marcheano, who owns the the Arches restaurant in Newport Beach.

Although cities and water agencies that own sewer lines must write their own ordinances, the basic requirements are the same. Most call for new restaurants to install grease interceptors or grease traps — scaled-down versions of interceptors that sit above ground but aren't as efficient — while existing restaurants are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Grease interceptors can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$40,000. Water from a kitchen sink flows into underground tanks where grease floats to the top and food residue sinks to the bottom. A pipe at mid-water level carries relatively grease-free water into the sewer.

Almost every city plans to issue annual permits to food establishments with fees ranging from \$15 to several hundred dollars to help pay for sewer upkeep.

The average Outback Steakhouse or Claim Jumper restaurant can generate 5,000 gallons of grease in a month, said Ken Theisen, staff environmental scientist for the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board.

If a restaurant expands or changes its menu, owners might be required to install underground grease tanks, said Assistant City Manager Dave Kiff. Restaurants that need a grease interceptor but don't have the space will have to follow as many management practices as they can and pay annual fees of \$700 to \$800.

City officials think restaurants are getting a fair offer.

The California Restaurant Assn. is pleased that cities are willing to be flexible rather than simply forcing every restaurant to install expensive grease interceptors.

Examples of closures due to grease.

5/26/2003 to 5/29/2003 1000' upcoast & 1000' downcoast of Talbert Channel, Huntington State Beach, Huntington Beach PPO (Huntington By the Sea Mobile Home Park)/Line blockage (grease)

~1000 gallons/sewage

11/16/2003 to 11/19/2003 Portofino Cove Marina & Sunset Aquatic Marina, Huntington Harbour, Huntington Beach from City of Stanton/Line blockage (grease) ~1000 gallons/sewage

12/15/2003 to 12/17/2003 Humboldt Beach, Huntington Harbour, Huntington Beach PPO (Apartment Complex)/Line blockage ~943 gallons/sewage ~470 gallons recovered ~473 gallons spilled

Report Sewage Spills!

City Sewer/Public Works Departments

Aliso Viejo (949) 425-2500

Anaheim (714) 765-6840

Brea (714) 990-7691

Buena Park (714) 562-3655

Costa Mesa (714) 754-5248

Cypress (714) 229-6760

Dana Point (949) 248-3562

Fountain Valley (714) 593-4600

Fullerton (714) 738-6897

Garden Grove (714) 741-5956

Huntington Beach (714) 960-8861

Irvine (949) 724-6515

Laguna Beach (949) 497-0765

Laguna Hills (949) 707-2650

Laguna Niguel (949) 362-4337

Laguna Woods (949) 639-0500

La Habra (562) 905-9792

La Palma (714) 690-3368

Lake Forest (949) 461-3480

Los Alamitos (562) 431-3538

Mission Viejo (949) 470-3095

Newport Beach (949) 644-3011

Orange (714) 532-6480

Orange County (714) 567-6363

Placentia (714) 993-8245

San Clemente (949) 366-1553

San Juan Capistrano (949) 443-6363

Santa Ana (714) 647-3380

Seal Beach (562) 431-2527

Stanton (714) 288-6742

Tustin (714) 962-2411

Villa Park (714) 998-1500

Westminster (714) 898-3311  
Yorba Linda (714) 961-7170

Public Sewer Districts

Costa Mesa Sanitary District (714) 754-5252  
(714) 393-4433  
El Toro Water District (949) 837-0660  
Emerald Bay Service District (949) 494-8571  
Garden Grove Sanitary District (714) 741-5395  
Irvine Ranch Water District (949) 453-5300  
Los Alamitos/Rossmoor Sewer District (562) 431-2223  
Midway City Sanitary District (Westminster) (714) 893-3553  
Moulton Niguel Water District (949) 831-2500  
Orange County Sanitation District (714) 962-2411  
Santa Margarita Water District (949) 459-6420  
South Coast Water District (949) 499-4555  
South Orange County Wastewater Authority (949) 234-5400  
Sunset Beach Sanitary District (562) 493-9932  
Trabuco Canyon Sanitary District (949) 858-0277  
Yorba Linda Water District (714) 777-3018

Other Agencies

Orange County Health Care Agency (714) 667-3600  
Office of Emergency Services (800) 852-7550