

FOOD SERVICE

City of Austin - Watershed Protection and Development Review Department

Food service establishments must maintain their facilities without polluting the environment

Austin is known for its entertaining music and good food. Many food service establishments serve Austin including eateries along famous 6th Street, "fast food" operations, quick stop convenience stores, and food processing plants. All of these establishments must be cleaned and maintained - everything from grease receptacles to cooking equipment. Most businesses understand why in terms of public health. What people may not know is these practices also potentially pollute Austin's waterways.

The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department is responsible for preventing pollutant discharges to the City storm drainage system and waterways as mandated by Title VI, Chapter 6-5 of the Austin City Code (Water Quality). This document provides food service establishment employees with information on maintaining the facility without polluting the environment.

The Problem

Poor grease bin maintenance.

Food service establishments that fry or grill foods accumulate cooking grease requiring disposal. Outdoor bins are commonly used to store the grease. Carrying heavy buckets of food grease to the bin, then lifting and emptying the buckets, is a difficult task. Too often, the grease splashes and drips down the sides and onto the ground. Overfilling the bin creates the same mess. Allowing the spilled grease to accumulate outside the storage container is not only an illegal pollutant discharge, but a public health nuisance as well. Food grease attracts flies and rodents, is a slip hazard, and is smelly. Leaving the lid open attracts vermin and allows

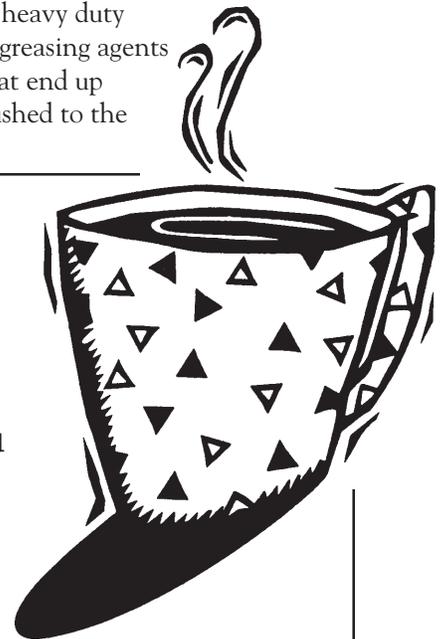
entrance of rainwater that can overflow the bin.

Grease discharged to a storm drain ends up in our creeks and lakes - where it coats fish gills, smothers aquatic organisms, and uses up oxygen needed by fish and aquatic life. If the grease bin is located on an unpaved surface such as soil, spill clean up can be more costly. The contaminated soil must be removed, disposed of properly and replaced. Grease spills smother landscape vegetation.

To make matters worse, cleaning agents used to remove spilled grease are discharged to the environment. Grease is typically removed by use of heavy duty degreasing agents that end up flushed to the

Wake up and smell the coffee...

Did you know that when you wash trash cans, floor mats, and kitchen equipment outside on the ground you are polluting the environment?



nearest storm drain. Some cleaning agents contain hazardous ingredients. Others contain nutrients that promote algae and weed growth in waterways. This unsightly growth depletes sunlight and oxygen needed for fish, chokes waterways, creates unpleasant drinking water taste and odors, and is costly to remove.



Overflowing grease traps.

Grilling and frying appreciable amounts of food requires the use of large outdoor grease traps. These grease traps remove food grease from dish and equipment cleaning wastewater, and diverts the wastewater to the sanitary sewer system. Traps that are not pumped regularly by a waste disposal service will become clogged and eventually overflow. Overflows are typically large in volume and have the potential to spread to vegetation, a storm drain, or a storm water pond. Grease trap overflows also clog storm water drainageways, leading to increased maintenance costs and potential flooding problems. Food grease is difficult to clean up and removing it is time

consuming and costly. Other common causes of polluting discharges from these traps are overfilling, clogged sewer lines, improper maintenance of grease trap filters, and accidental spills caused by the waste hauling service during routine trap pumping.

Careless equipment cleaning.

Cleaning food service equipment (e.g. cook's line ventilation hood filters, trash cans, floor mats, mop/buckets, etc.) outside, especially near a storm drain, is illegal. It may seem convenient, but the grease and grime in the wash water accumulates on the ground and is washed into and pollutes storm sewers and waterways. Wash water typically contains food particles and grease, cleaning chemicals (many are toxic), trash, and debris. Similar to grease trap waste, wash water can create a public health nuisance and pollute the environment.

Poorly maintained dumpsters.

Unfortunately, many people use dumpsters for disposing of all kinds of waste. However, they cannot be used for food grease, liquid wastes, or hazardous materials. Such disposal not only threatens the environment, but also threatens the health and safety of sanitation workers and the general public. Spills inside the dumpster can create odor problems and attract vermin, thereby requiring removal of the dumpster for thorough cleaning at an approved facility operated by your dumpster service. In addition, liquid wastes will not be accepted by landfills.

Another problem is when trash and debris spill or blow out of the dumpster, when they are

open, overfilled, or in poor condition. Unbagged trash and food refuse also promotes waste spreading and spills. This material is then easily carried to storm sewers or waterways by wind and rain. Decaying food wastes in waterways require oxygen for decomposition, resulting in strong odors, and a depleted oxygen supply for aquatic life. Trash and debris also clog waterways and decrease the waterway's recreational value. As with grease bins, cleaning the area around the dumpster is sometimes necessary, but can cause illegal discharges of cleaning agents and grime to storm sewers and waterways. In addition, placement of dumpsters on unpaved surfaces such as soil results in costly removal, disposal, and restoration of contaminated areas when leaks or spills occur.

Improper pavement cleaning.

Paved areas around a food service establishment will, over time, accumulate dirt, grime, grease and trash from pedestrians, vehicle traffic, and daily operations. If left to accumulate, these pollutants are flushed by rain, contaminating our creeks and lakes. Businesses usually strive to keep public areas clean and safe for their customers. However, during this effort, cleaning agents are used and too often illegally flushed, along with the grease and grime, to storm sewers and waterways. The cumulative effect of illegal discharges to streams and lakes from pavement cleaning all over the City would be tremendous. In addition, common automotive fluid leaks and spills like antifreeze, left on the pavement, are toxic to humans, animals, and aquatic life.



Improper vehicle cleaning.

Some food service establishments have delivery vehicles or food transport trucks requiring routine cleaning. Allowing the wash water to reach the nearest storm drain is a polluting discharge. Again, the cumulative impact on our waterways from all the equipment, pavement and vehicle washing by the community is great.

Mishandling of spills.

Accidental spills will happen. For example, food products from delivery trucks may be spilled around the loading area. Customer, employee and delivery vehicles may leak oil, fuel and antifreeze. If left on the pavement, spills are carried to storm drains, landscape, oil/grit separators and storm water ponds by rain or storm water runoff. This pollutes the environment and results in costly fines and site cleanups. In addition, if spills are flushed off site with a water hose, the untreated pollutants are carried to our creeks and lakes.

Not knowing your storm drainage structures.

Some older buildings may have floor drains connected to the storm sewer system. Occasionally, a building will have a mop or hand wash sink illegally plumbed to the storm sewer system. Some food service establishments have a loading dock with a drain that collects storm water and diverts it to the storm sewer system or a storm water pond. Many business lots have storm drain oil/grit separators that capture and help filter oils and sediment from storm water runoff. Others have storm water ponds that help pre-

vent flooding and filter pollutants. If business operators do not know what these structures are, though, chances are they will be misused for illegal dumping of wastes, or not maintained properly. If a pond or separator is not maintained, it will not function efficiently or effectively. Allowing chemicals to enter these structures costs in environmental remediations, fines, and maintenance of the structures.

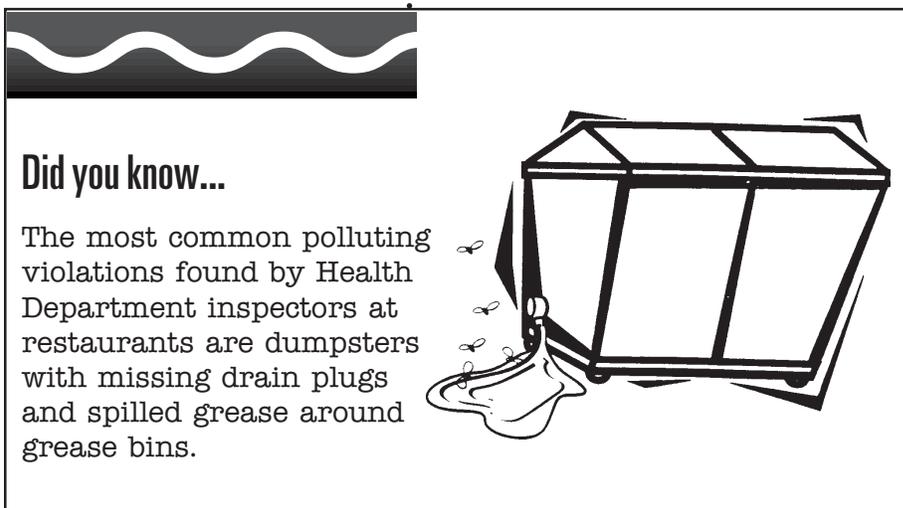
Poor landscape practices.

Excessive application of fertilizers and pesticides to landscaped and even paved areas, especially before a rain, causes the discharge of algae-promoting or toxic chemicals to a storm sewer or creek. Use of petroleum products to kill weeds significantly impacts the environment. These substances are very toxic, persist in the soil for many years, and seep into and pollute our groundwater supply. Some are cancer-causing agents. Leaves and grass clippings blown off sidewalks, driveways and parking lots are also carried to storm drains when it rains, providing excess harmful organic

matter to waterways. Tree and hedge trimmings can clog drainageways and promote flooding. As these wastes decompose in a waterway, they use up oxygen needed for aquatic life to survive. If your business is located along a waterway, be extra cautious about the landscaping methods you choose.

Misuse of septic systems.

Some more remote food establishments are connected to septic systems instead of wastewater treatment plants. Knowing how these systems operate and what cannot be discharged through them will prevent the potential for costly maintenance and subsurface pollution. Septic systems use biological organisms to facilitate the breakdown of wastes typically found in domestic sewage. Chemicals that kill the biological organisms in the septic system will cause the system to fail, thereby releasing pollutants to the environment. Therefore, dumping strong cleaning chemicals (e.g. bleach) or toxic materials into a septic system will destroy the organisms in the system. Overfilling a septic system



with waste will cause the system to overflow and release partially or untreated wastewater (sewage). Sewage contaminates drinking water and promotes prolific algae growth in waterways.

Polluting construction/remodeling activities.

When businesses expand or remodel, chemicals and materials such as drywall, joint compound, paint, thinner, turpentine, wood, and insulation are typically used. Any of these materials pollute our waterways if dumped or spilled. Drywall, paint, and joint compound act like a very fine sediment, blocking light needed by plants and smothering bottom-dwelling organisms. Some paint, especially oil-based paint, contains petroleum products and hazardous metals. In addition, poorly managed materials such as wood and insulation will, at a minimum, clog the waterway, increasing the potential for flooding.

The Solution

Properly maintain grease bins.
Place grease bins in a easily

cleaned paved area. Surround the area with a concrete curbing to contain spills and cleaning wastewater. The spills and wastewater are then easily removed for disposal. Carefully transport grease to and from your bin. If a grease spill occurs, clean it up immediately. Properly schedule waste service pick-ups to prevent overfilling. Should unanticipated overfilling occur, contact your disposal service for prompt removal. Monitor pumping activities and promptly clean up spills caused by waste haulers. You are responsible for any contamination on your property. Make sure grease bin lids are closed to prevent entry of vermin and overflows due to accumulated rainwater.

Schedule regular clean ups of the bin and surrounding pavement. During cleaning, capture and remove wastewater for disposal to the sanitary sewer system. A mop and bucket works well to prevent cleaning wastewater runoff. Contact the City Water and Wastewater Department for sanitary sewer system disposal and permit require-

ments. Their phone number is listed at the end of this document.

Use and maintain outdoor dumpsters and trash compactors properly.

Like grease bins, keep outdoor dumpsters and trash compactors on a concrete pad and consider installing a concrete containment area. Dumpster and compactors are only for disposal of dry, non-hazardous wastes - never food grease, liquid or hazardous wastes. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department provides a dumpster fact sheet describing detailed waste prohibitions. Dispose of garbage in the dumpster in tightly sealed bags. Carefully transport wastes to and from your dumpster or trash compactor. Clean up anything that spills. Properly schedule waste service pick-ups to prevent overfilling. Should unanticipated overfilling occur, contact your disposal service for timely removal. Monitor emptying of your dumpster and promptly clean up spills caused by waste haulers. You are responsible for any contamination on your property.

Keep lids closed.

Check the dumpster or compactor area routinely for cleaning needs. If your dumpster needs cleaning inside, contact your disposal

Did you know...

A single garbage container can produce up to **20,000** fly larvae each week if left uncovered.



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service to replace the dumpster rather than trying to clean it yourself. Trash services have facilities to clean dumpsters and dispose of the wash water properly. Keep the exterior of the dumpster and compactor, and surrounding pavement as clean as possible. During cleaning, capture and remove wastewater for disposal to the sanitary sewer system. A mop and bucket works well to prevent cleaning wastewater runoff. Contact the City Water and Wastewater Department for sanitary sewer system disposal and permit requirements. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department provides a fact sheet detailing proper dumpster use and maintenance.

Keep grease traps cleaned.

Outdoor sanitary sewer grease traps and associated sewer lines must be regularly cleaned by a disposal service to prevent overflows into your parking lot and storm drains. Schedule regular trap pumping, and monitor the trap for unanticipated overfilling.

Provide a proper equipment cleaning area.

Do not use any outdoor drains for disposal of equipment cleaning wastewater unless they are connected to the sanitary sewer system, and a permit is obtained from the City's Water and Wastewater Department. Drains without overhead cover are typically not allowed to connect to the sanitary sewer. Provide a large enough area inside your business or in an area with overhead cover to wash equipment such as trash cans, floor mats, mops, mop buckets, and hood filters. This area needs a drain that collects the wash water and diverts it to the sanitary sewer system. The sanitary drain connection must be approved by the City's Water and Wastewater Department.

Collect and dispose of wastes during pavement cleaning.

Check your lot daily for cleaning needs. Pick up trash and sweep daily to remove dirt and sediment. Absorb any puddles such as automotive fluids using kitty litter, mop & bucket, wet vacuum or similar equipment. Pre-clean heavy oil and grease stains, and slick spots using a small mixture of water and mild, powdered detergent. Brush the mixture into the stain. Let stand until dry and sweep up for disposal in the trash. A cold water rinse might be all that is needed after pre-cleaning.

However, if you have larger areas that require cleaning, the wash water discharge must not drain to a storm sewer, oil/grit separator, the landscape or a storm water pond. Instead, pavement cleaning is legal if the wastewater is collected for proper disposal with a mop & bucket or

scrubbing machine that vacuums up the water and grime as it cleans.

The wastewater can be disposed of via indoor sanitary sewer drains, with prior approval from the City's Water and Wastewater Department. Do not dump mop water in outside storm drains. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department can provide a list of sorbent material suppliers as well as a fact sheet describing approved pave-

Provide an area with overhead cover and a sanitary sewer drain to wash equipment such as trash cans, floor mats, mops, mop buckets and hook filters.



ment, vehicle and equipment cleaning methods. See the phone numbers provided at the end of this document.

Clean food service vehicles at an approved location.

Washing vehicles must be done at approved facilities with drains under overhead cover and connected to a wastewater treatment plant or system. Car wash businesses typically have approved facilities that are permitted by the City of Austin Water and Wastewater Department. No wash water is allowed to discharge to the environment.

Clean spills as they happen.

If a spill occurs, clean it up immediately with sorbent material or a mop and bucket - before it reaches a storm drain and spreads to a creek or lake. Never leave spills unattended or flush them with water. If necessary, block drains with sorbent material to keep the spill out. Spills on soil should be excavated for proper disposal. Small spills can be dug up, sealed in garbage bags and placed in the trash. Contact the Watershed Protection and Development Review Department for soil cleanup instructions resulting from larger spills.

Keep spill cleanup and containment materials handy for use when needed. Have a written spill contingency plan posted at your site giving information on what to do in the event of a release. Federal and State law requires Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for each chemical used at your facility - they must be readily available if a chemical spill occurs. The chemi-

cal manufacturer should supply these documents free of charge. The manufacturer's phone number is sometimes found on the product label.

Use care during landscaping.

Use Integrated Pest Management which emphasizes prevention and natural pest control methods instead of chemicals. For example, weeds can be controlled by the use of ground cover plants and mulch. Ashes, diatomaceous earth, limestone and other natural materials applied to the landscape may act as an irritant and repel bugs. Landscape with native or adaptive plants that require less water, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Use compost or manure as natural fertilizers. If used, chemical fertilizers and pesticides should be applied according to directions on the label. Use only the amount necessary to do the job. Never apply toxic pesticides near water bodies, water wells and wildlife habitats. Check the weather before applying lawn chemicals to avoid application just before it rains or when it is windy.

Design a landscape that limits the volume or decreases the speed of storm water runoff and irrigation water. This lowers the chances of erosion and washing of pollutants into storm drains.

Spill cleanup tips

- Clean up spills immediately with proper tools
- Never leave spills unattended or flush with water.
- Keep spill cleanup and containment materials handy
- Develop a spill contingency plan and post it.



Leave grass clippings on the lawn. Sweep grass and leaves out of the street to keep them out of storm drains and waterways. Collect tree and hedge trimmings for disposal through your waste disposal service. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department provides a fact sheet with more details regarding the proper use of fertilizers and pesticides as well as proper landscape maintenance.



Know your drainage.

Nothing but clean rain water may enter our storm drainage system according to Federal law. Keep all wastes/wastewater and spilled products from entering drains, oil/grit separators and storm water ponds. Educate employees on the function of these structures and what to do to prevent their misuse. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department provides a fact sheet with instructions on proper use

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and maintenance of separators and ponds. If you do not know to which system (storm or sanitary sewer system) the drains connect, contact the Watershed Protection and Development Review Department or a licensed plumber for a dye trace and/or other verification method. If you find that a mop sink or other plumbing fixture is improperly connected, have it fixed immediately to prevent additional contamination. Post signs at outside storm drains to prevent their misuse. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department can provide a free kit to mark your storm drains.

Proper use of septic systems.

Keep septic systems regularly maintained to prevent failure. If

you are concerned about chemicals harming your septic system, contact the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department for specifics. Their phone number is at the end of this document.

Proper construction/remodeling activities.

Use plastic sheeting or tarpaulins during painting activities to capture drips and spills. Wash water-based paint equipment at a sink that is plumbed to the sanitary sewer system. All containers of chemicals should be placed under protective cover and kept closed to prevent spills. Construction trash and debris should be picked up regularly and disposed of through your dumpster service. If you have reusable leftover chemicals, contact the City's Waste Reduction Assistance Program for disposal alternatives. Non-reusable oil-based paint and other toxic chemicals must be disposed of through an approved waste disposal service. The Watershed Protection and Development Review Department can provide disposal service lists for various waste types.

Reduce, reuse, recycle.

Reducing the amount of waste generated saves on disposal costs. The best way to do this is buy only what you need. Then, use up all you bought to prevent waste generation.

Many waste materials can be reused or recycled. Reuse landscape debris such as leaves, grass clippings, and small shrub trimmings by composting. When mowing the grass, leave the grass clippings on the lawn. Used food grease can be stored in a leak-

proof container for recycling through an approved hauler. Special dumpsters to recycle cardboard are available through many of the local waste disposal services. Donate excess construction materials to a non-profit organization such as Habitat for Humanity. Other wastes such as metal and plastic product containers can be recycled either through local waste haulers or non-profit organizations. The City's Waste Reduction Assistance Program can help with alternative material handling and waste exchange options. Their phone number is provided at the end of this document.

Train employees.

Prevention is the key to eliminating pollution. The best pollution prevention method is training your employees on how to do their job without creating polluting discharges. While it takes time to train employees, it is actually time well spent and invested in your business to prevent clean ups, site restorations, regulatory fines, and injuries.

The Cost

Businesses have found that it costs time and money to implement water pollution prevention measures. However, the expense to clean-up spills and restore property after they occur is much greater. Small, seemingly insignificant leaks and spills become large contamination problems if steps are not taken for containment, clean up, and prevention. Many spills are extremely expensive to clean up and dispose of properly. Spills that are not mitigated can cause soil or groundwa-



ter contamination which could impact future sale or transfer of property until the responsible party mitigates the damage.

Clean up costs and real estate depreciation are not the only possible pollution costs. Fines from City, State or Federal agencies add thousands of dollars to the overall cost of a polluting discharge. In addition to imposing fines, regulatory agencies can require businesses to undergo detailed compliance audits to implement long-term water monitoring programs, or require the installation of expensive pollution prevention equipment and programs.



For more information:

Pollution prevention for food service establishments; spill response, list of recycling and disposal services, sorbent material suppliers; fact sheets on dumpsters, proper cleaning methods, landscape maintenance, oil/grit separators and storm water ponds

City of Austin Watershed Protection Development and Review Department
Pollution Prevention and Reduction Section
(512) 974-2550

Food establishment permitting and inspection, restaurant grease receptacle requirements, liquid waste hauler licensing, public health nuisances, septic system regulations

Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department
(512) 972-5600

Sanitary sewer discharges

City of Austin Water and Wastewater Department
Special Services Division
(512) 972-1060

Small business waste disposal information, Waste Exchange Program

City of Austin Solid Waste Services Department
Waste Reduction Assistance Program
(512) 974-4331

Waste storage/disposal requirements, recycling/reuse information

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Region 11 Office
(512) 339-2929

