

# MARBLEHEAD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION



## THE FLOW N' GO

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### WE NEED YOUR HELP TO KEEP MARBLEHEAD'S SANITARY SEWER SYSTEM RUNNING SAFELY AND EFFICIENTLY

Over the ten years that the Commission has been publishing *The Flow n' Go*, there have been numerous articles about how you as a homeowner can help to prevent blockages and backups in the sanitary sewer system that can result in costly damage to your home and to the sewer pump stations. For some reason our pleas have been pretty much ignored and the same issues continue to occur and have even become more prevalent.

We have decided to dedicate this issue of *The Flow n' Go* to once again implore upon our residents to be extra cognizant of what materials they are flushing down the drain. Just words in the past have not proven to be effective so this time we will emphasize the point with several photos of actual sewer blockages. While they may not be pleasant to look at, we are hoping that they finally get the point across: Never flush any **'non-dispersible'** materials down the drain.

So, just what are **'dispersible'** materials? 'Dispersible' describes a product's ability to disintegrate in water or other liquid. Toilet paper, for example, is a dispersible product and is flushable. Products such as baby, sanitizing, and cleaning wipes are not dispersible and therefore are *not* flushable—even though they claim to be. Wipes do not breakdown and will cause blockages in the sewer collection system and these blockages can result in damages to the sewer pumps as well as a sewer backup in your home.



This point is well-illustrated by this picture. The jar on the left shows that toilet paper disintegrates in water while the jar on the right shows that baby wipes do not. Eventually, these wipes will build up in the sewer lines or your home's sewer service line and form a blockage. When the waste that you are flushing can't get past this blockage it has no place to go other than backing up into your home. When that happens the result is very messy and very costly.

### GREASE, FAT ALSO CAUSE BLOCKAGES AND BACKUPS

Another major cause of sewer blockages is fat buildup. On two occasions in the past few months Marblehead sewer crews have responded to backups that were the result of fat and grease that had congealed, totally blocking the sewer line.

You may recall that in July, 2019, sewer backed up into four houses in nearby Melrose resulting in extensive damage and rendering the homes uninhabitable. The cause of the Melrose backup was an accumulation of fat in the sewer line. (This is an actual picture of the clogged Melrose sewer main.)



What happened in Melrose can very easily happen—and has happened - in Marblehead.

You should never, under any circumstances, pour any form of oil, grease, or fat down the drain. They should instead be put in an empty tin can and disposed of with the household trash.

Remember, say "NO" to 'FOG' - NO Fats, NO Oils, NO Grease.

### Did you know ... ?

If you are planning to have any work done on the sewer service line to your house, the contractor must apply for and receive a drain layer license from the Commission and the proper permits be obtained before any work is started.

Contact the Commission for a list of contractors who are licensed by the Commission and for what permits are required.

Visit [Marblehead.org/water](http://Marblehead.org/water) for more information.

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## OUR WARNINGS ARE NOT SCARE TACTICS; THEY ARE REALITY

As we noted on the front of this *Flow n' Go*, for some reason past warnings about flushing non-dispersible materials down the toilet have not been heeded. Maybe residents think that we are just 'crying wolf.' Hopefully, the pictures in this issue will put that theory to rest.

To further emphasize how drastic this situation has become, the sewer department recently responded to a sewer main backup in the Green Street area. There the crew found that the blockage was caused by an accumulation of wipes and

other non-dispersible items too repulsive to mention.

While it may be unpleasant to look at, a sewer department employee can be seen in this picture holding a sample of what was removed from the Green Street Pumping Station. This blockage prevented the sew-



er from flowing properly and resulted in the backup.

As you can now (hopefully) understand, we (and you) can no longer take this issue lightly. We must all make a concerted effort to eliminate all non-dispersible materials from our sanitary sewer system.

This can only be accomplished if every residence and business in town vows to stop using their toilets as a trash can.

A picture is worth a thousand words!

## THE MARBLEHEAD INFILTRATION / INFLOW PROGRAM: COMMISSION TO CONDUCT SMOKE TESTING OF SEWER SYSTEM

The Marblehead Water and Sewer Commission, in conjunction with Haley and Ward Engineers and as part of Marblehead's Infiltration / Inflow Program, have contracted with Flow Assessment Services to conduct sewer system smoke testing to locate sources of storm water inflow and groundwater infiltration to the sanitary sewer system.

Storm water that finds its way into the sanitary sewer system adds to the cost of sanitary sewer treatment and can result in overloading the sewer system during periods of heavy rain. (The stormwater drain system, where stormwater is supposed to go, is a completely separate system from the sanitary sewer system.)

The study will locate direct and indirect connections such as catch basins, area drains, roof drains, broken sewer pipe, and deteriorated pipe joints.

The smoke tests consist of harmless white smoke introduced through the sanitary sewer system using smoke-generating machinery. During this procedure, this white smoke will vent from holes in manhole covers located on the street as well as plumbing vent pipes located on or near your roof surface.

You may also witness smoke coming out of grass, cracked pavement, catch basins, and roof drains, similar to what is seen in the photo below.

Smoke should not enter your premises



unless there is a dry trap or defective plumbing. You should pour some water down unused plumbing fixtures or a basement drain to ensure that the drain trap will be effective.

If you notice smoke inside your home during the smoke testing it may indicate the susceptibility of gases from the sewer system entering your building through the defective plumbing.

Should smoke be detected within the building, do not be alarmed. The smoke is non-toxic and non-staining. Simply ventilate the home and report the pres-

ence of smoke to the personnel conducting the test outside in the vicinity of your building. If possible, they will assist you in locating the source that allowed the smoke to enter the building.

The smoke testing is expected to begin this summer and will be done in the Front Street pumping district, Clifton Avenue pumping district, Village Street pumping district, and Norman Street pumping district (Steer Swamp area).

Affected residences will be notified 24 to 72 hours before the smoke testing will be conducted in their neighborhood.

- You are not required to be home when the testing is being performed on your street.
- The testing will be performed 24 to 72 hours after notification is received.
- Weather could shift the test periods beyond the 24 to 72 hour time frame.
- Once notified, please call Flow Assessment Services at **1-888-311-9799** should you have any questions or concerns.

For more information on The Marblehead Sump Redirection Program and the Infiltration / Inflow Program as well as the schedule of when smoke testing will be conducted, we encourage you to visit [www.resump.org](http://www.resump.org) and the sewer department webpage at [marblehead.org](http://marblehead.org). Frequent updates will be provided so it is suggested that you check the website often.