



# THE FLOW N' GO

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## FOR ACCURATE WATER QUALITY INFORMATION, ALWAYS GO TO THE SOURCE AND NOT RELY ON FACEBOOK

Facebook. The greatest invention since sliced bread. The best source for information on anything anyone ever needs to know about everything. Not!

Recently, a Facebook 'chain' (is that what it's called?) involved an exchange over the quality of Marblehead's drinking water. The 'conversation' started out as someone looking for information on the testing of our water and somehow evolved into comments about the taste of Florida's drinking water.

If any resident has a question about the quality of Marblehead's water or how the water is tested, the most direct way to get an (accurate) answer is to call the source itself — the Marblehead water department or the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), which supplies our water.

The MWRA uses a state-of-the-art system to monitor water quality around the clock to assure that our drinking water is contaminant-free. Both MWRA and the Marblehead water department collect and analyze water samples on a daily basis. In addition, the Marblehead water department collects bi-weekly water samples from various locations in town—over twenty samples each month—and has them tested at the MWRA laboratory in Chelsea. Water quality testing is, and always will be, a high priority for the MWRA and the Marblehead water department.

What does the MWRA test for? A seven-page list of potential contaminants for which our water is tested can be found on the MWRA's website at [www.mwra.com](http://www.mwra.com). Click on "Water System" on the left side of the page then select "All Water Quality Test Results."

In addition to the list of contaminants,

one can also access weekly, monthly and annual test data reports. The Weekly Water Quality Report is published every Friday using data collected through Thursday afternoon and contains information such as daily coliform bacteria results, pH and alkalinity results, applied treatments and so much more on the quality of MWRA's water.

The monthly Water Quality Update includes even more detailed water quality analysis results.

There is also a Frequently Asked Questions section that will answer many of your tap water-related concerns. The answers given on the MWRA website are going to be more accurate than you will ever get from a Facebook 'conversation.'

Each June, the MWRA publishes a *Consumer Confidence Report* for each of their 51 member-communities. This brochure is mailed to every residence in town and contains water testing results and a message from the chairman of the Water and Sewer Commission. (Yes, Facebook users, the Consumer Confidence Report is still published. The 2017 Report, which was mailed to everyone last June, can be found on the MWRA website. The 2018 report will be sent out to all residences this coming June.)

The MWRA website has an abundance of information on everything from facts about fluoride to facts about lead in the drinking water. (Hint: MWRA's source waters, the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs, contain no lead.)

If you have any questions about water quality that you can't find answers to on the website, you can contact the water department at 781 631-0102 or at [water@marblehead.org](mailto:water@marblehead.org).

## TIP OF THE QUARTER

*Did you know ...*

One pint of improperly disposed of used motor oil can create a one-acre slick on the surface of our harbors?

Our storm drains empty into the surrounding waters. Whatever goes down the catch basin ends up in the harbors.

That's why it's important, when you change your car's oil, to not let it collect on the street where it will be washed down the storm water drain.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## SAY “NO” TO FOG (FATS, OILS AND GREASE)

This past January the sewer department received a call about sewer backing up into the basement of a building in town. A crew was immediately dispatched to identify the cause of the backup.

Upon investigation, it was found that a massive amount of grease and other insoluble materials had formed a blockage in the sewer line. This caused the sewerage to be forced back into the building. The clean-up, and the inconvenience, was substantial—and expensive.

This type of incident is not uncommon. It is caused by the disposal of **F**ats, **O**ils and **G**rease (**FOG**) down the drain. FOG creates one of the largest problems for sewer utilities and their customers.

Coagulated grease in pipes is one of the leading causes of sanitary sewer backups. It can occur in the public sewer lines and in the customers’ service lines and poses a costly risk to household plumbing and to the town’s sewer system.

When fats, oils and grease (this includes cooking oils, butter, sauces, dairy products and meats that are put through a garbage disposal) are put into the sewer system, they become congealed and can cause the sewer lines to become clogged.

There are ways that you can help keep your household’s

(and the town’s) sewer lines flowing freely and hopefully avoid a back-up situation like what occurred in January.

- Never pour grease down sink drains or into toilets or garbage disposals. (Pour grease and oils into a covered disposable container and put it in the trash. This editor puts the cooled grease and oils in the sturdy re-sealable bags that coffee comes in or in empty Pringles cans.) \*
- Before you wash the frying pan, soak up any remaining grease with paper towels and toss them in the trash. (Crumbled up newspaper also works well for this.) \*
- Scrape fatty food scraps from your plates into the trash, not into the garbage disposal. (Even better, never put *anything* into the disposal. Recycle as much of your household waste as possible by composting. Read the article below for how to compost and composting tips.) \*

\* If you want to keep all of your kitchen by-products out of the waste stream entirely, there are commercial companies that will collect all kitchen waste (including meat scraps, fats, bones, dairy, paper towels, pizza boxes and more) and compost them into nutrient-rich soil. Information can be obtained by contacting the Board of Health at 781 631-0212 or on their website at [www.marblehead.org/health](http://www.marblehead.org/health).

*(Material from the Boston Water and Sewer Commission was used for this article.)*

## Return your vegetable scraps to the soil, not the sewer

In the article above we caution you about putting fatty food scraps—or anything else—down the garbage disposal. Not only can it harm your pipes, the ground-up debris enters the sewer system and must be removed at the treatment plant before the sewerage can be processed. This adds to the town’s treatment expense, a cost that is passed along to our customers.

Instead, you should recycle your organic food scraps into nutrient-rich compost that can be added back to your garden soil. Composting can divert as much as 30% of household waste away from the garbage can. (While meat scraps and bones can be composted by large-scale commercial composting operations, meat and bones should not be put into home composting bins. They require a long time to break down and can attract unwanted animals and insects.)

The secret to healthy compost is to maintain a carbon/nitrogen ratio of about two-thirds carbon-generating (‘brown’) materials to one-third nitrogen-generating (‘green’) materials and to aerate (turn) the material often to introduce carbon (air) into the pile.

Brown (carbon) materials include leaves, pine needles, hay, shredded newspaper and even dryer lint. Green (nitrogen) materials include most of your organic kitchen waste: fruit and vegetable scraps and coffee and tea grounds, as well as flowers and cuttings and grass clippings.

You can build a compost bin from the many designs that are available online, which requires manual turning of the pile, or you can purchase a tumbler that you simply spin to aerate. The tumbler was the choice of this editor who is a bit on the lazy side.

## COMMISSION LOSES MEMBER

John Doane, who was in his eleventh year as a member of the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners, passed away this past January 17 at the age of 81.



His input and direction over these years was instrumental in the progress that the water, sewer and drain departments have made. During his tenure, Doane oversaw the replacement of the Clifton sewer pumping station, upgrades to several other sewer pump stations, replacement of the sewer pipelines under Salem Harbor, Pleasant Street drain project, renovation of the Tedesco Street water booster station, and renewal of miles of water and sewer mains.

The remaining Commissioners and the Board of Selectmen met in February and named Thomas Carroll to fill the empty seat.