MARBLEHEAD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

THE FLOW N' GO

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GREASE BUILD-UP CONTRIBUTED TO MELROSE SEWER MISHAP

We may sound like a broken record when we keep cautioning people to watch what they put down their drains. Several articles have appeared in *The Flow N' Go* over the past years imploring residents to not empty oils, grease and fats in their sink drains. Everyone is probably sick of hearing this by now.

But it is with good reason that we are constantly trying to get this message across to our customers. An incident in the City of Melrose this past summer is stark proof as to what can happen when people do not heed the warnings.

On July 20, the Melrose Department of Public Works responded to a report of a potential water issue. Upon investigation, a blockage was found in the sewer line.

Following "typical protocol," city workers attempted to clear the blockage by using a high-pressure water jet hose. The obstruction was so severe the line backed up, sending sewerage bubbling up through toilets and sinks in four homes on Brazil Street, resulting in extensive damage and rendering the homes uninhabitable.

The City hired an outside engineering firm to conduct an independent review to determine possible causes for the backup. The firm's report found that the blockage consisted of roots, debris, and grease.

The report places some of the blame for the backup on the residents themselves.

"Many of the homes along Brazil Street were contributing significant amounts of grease over an extensive period of time into the city sewers …," the report states. "The existing capacities of the individual service connections was reduced due to the large amounts of grease observed in each service connection."

(This is an actual photo of a sewer service line on Brazil Street, Melrose, clogged by grease.)

The Marblehead sewer department has an ongoing root treatment program to take care of tree roots infiltrating the sewer mains as well as a cleaning program which removes clogged grease (and other debris) from the mains. But we can't do anything about grease buildup in your service line, like in the service line above, other than to constantly remind everyone about putting things like so-called 'flushable' wipes (which are not flushable) and grease into the sewer system.

Could an incident such as this happen in Marblehead? Well, anything is possible. But the chances would be significantly reduced if everyone would take our advice seriously and be cautious of what they put down the drain.

FIND HOME WINTERIZING TIPS AT MARBLEHEAD.ORG/WATER

By taking steps now, you can better the chances of your home escaping winter's grip unscathed. Past issues of *The Flow n' Go* have included articles on how to get your house "winter-ready." Go to www.marblehead.org/water to read about:

- *Dropping Temps Can Lead to Burst Water Pipes* (Volume 2.Issue 3).
- *Don't Wait Until Winter is Here—Prepare for it Now* (Volume 3/Issue 2).
- *Prepare Your House Now for Winter Weather Ahead* (Volume 4/Issue 2).
- *You Awaken to a Frozen Water Pipe. What Should You Do?* (Volume 4/Issue 2).
- *'An Ounce of Prevention…' can Prevent Frozen Pipes* (Volume 6/Issue 2).

TIP OF THE QUARTER

Report Prohibited Dumping

The dumping of **any** substance into a stormwater catch basin is prohibited. This includes pet waste, household chemicals, automotive fluids, fertilizers, and anything else that isn't water from the sky (also know as rain).

Anything put into a stormwater catch basin ends up draining into and polluting our harbors and harming aquatic life.

If you see someone dumping anything into a catch basin, call the Commission office at 781 631-0102 or 781 631-2694.

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FOR JUST A MOMENT, TRY TO 'IMAGINE A DAY WITHOUT WATER'

On October 23, 2019, organizations around the world participated in the fifth annual 'Imagine a Day Without Water' observance hosted by the Value of Water Campaign (www.thevalueofwater.org).

Last year's event (2018) saw more than 1,100 groups from Kenya, India, Jordan, Canada and Antarctica join organizations in this country in spreading the word that even one day without safe, reliable water would be a crisis. Participating groups were as varied as water utilities, schools, aquariums, scout troops, science and health museums, and breweries.

Can you imagine waking up one morning and having no water to drink or to make coffee—which, for some, would be a crisis all itself. There would be no water to shower, flush toilets, or do laundry. Hospitals would close without water. Firefighters couldn't put out fires and farmers couldn't water their crops.

Americans take water for granted every day. Turn on the tap, and clean water flows out. Flush the toilet, and dirty water goes away. Now, take a moment to consider what your day would be like if you turned on the tap and nothing came out.

Besides health issues, potential dangers, and the inconvenience of having no water, a study by the Value of Water organization reports that a single nationwide day without water would put $43.5 billion in economic activity at risk.

The water infrastructure in our country—that's the system by which water is transported from the source to the tap—is aging and in need of constant maintenance. If the infrastructure fails, the water stops flowing.

It is estimated that in America today, a water main breaks every two minutes. According to a report issued by the American Society of Civil Engineers, $4.8 trillion needs to be invested in water infrastructure over the next twenty years to maintain a state of good repair.

Not only does our aging water delivery system threaten the ability to receive water, demographic changes and other factors such as droughts, floods, wildfires, groundwater depletion, and pollution from toxic algae blooms, chemicals, and sewage also put the water supply at risk.

Those of us living in Marblehead are extremely lucky. We receive our water from the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), which maintains the Quabbin Reservoir in western Massachusetts. Covering 39 square miles, the Quabbin has a capacity of 412 billion gallons of water and supplies water to 51 member communities.

The MWRA monitors water quality 24/7 and analyzes multiple samples on a daily basis to ensure the safety of our water supply. The Marblehead water department also collects over twenty samples each month from various locations around town and has them tested at the MWRA laboratory in Chelsea.

Our region of the country is also blessed in that we are not prone to many of the calamities—such as floods, droughts, and wildfires—that other parts of the country experience.

The Marblehead Water and Sewer Commission is, and always has been, very proactive when it comes to maintaining our water, sewer, and drain infrastructures. They have never been hesitant to raise water and sewer rates when necessary to improve the systems and to assure that our structures serve their purpose without major disruptions for many, many years to come.

Over the past several years, numerous major improvements to Marblehead's water infrastructure have been made. These include replacement of the water main on Harbor and Ocean avenues and Nahant Street as well as on a section of Pleasant Street; upgrades and improvements to the water lines on Jersey Street, Seaview Avenue, and Doak's Lane; cleaning and lining of the water mains in the Commercial Street area and Old Salem Road area; improvements to the Burke's Hill water tower; and the rehabilitation of the Tedesco Street Booster Pumping Station. There were dozens more smaller-scale projects completed during this time as well.

And, a project is currently planned to make much-needed improvements to the water lines in the Bassett Street area.

All of these projects were paid for through the water rates. No tax dollars were used. When one considers that the money they pay for water not only provides them with clean, safe water at the turn of a faucet but also with important maintenance and upgrades to the water infrastructure, they are getting a lot of bang for their buck. The current low water usage rate of $5.15 per 100 cubic feet (.0068 of a cent per gallon) buys a lot more than the water itself.

While you were reading this article, did you take a moment to "Imagine a Day Without Water?' Did you consider what it would be like if you woke up in the morning and, when you turned the faucet on to get water to make coffee, nothing came out?

If the number of calls the water and sewer office receives whenever we have to briefly shut the water off to a neighborhood for routine maintenance or to repair a break is any indication, one would think that the world was coming to an end.

"I was in the shower and I have shampoo in my hair; how am I going to rinse it out?." "I just exercised and I need to take a shower. I can't go to work smelling like this." "I can't function without that first cup of coffee. Can you bring one to me?"

These comments, and many more like them, are the result of just a brief interruption to water service. Now can you 'Imagine a Day Without Water?' Or a week without water? Or even longer?

It's not a pretty picture, is it? That's why continuing investment in our water systems are so vital.