

FOOD HANDLING FACILITIES

The City of Palo Alto has two systems of pipelines that convey rainwater runoff and sanitary wastewater. Storm drains carry storm water and other runoff from streets, commercial centers, industrial sites and open spaces into streams, creeks and San Francisco Bay. Any non-storm water materials that enter the storm drains are discharged directly into the creeks and the Bay without any treatment. Sanitary sewers convey wastewater discharges from residential, commercial and industrial sources into the City's wastewater treatment plant, where a significant fraction of water pollutants are removed prior to discharge to the San Francisco Bay.

Recent studies show that food handling facilities are one of the sources of releases of water pollutants to storm drains. Improper discharges of oil and grease, food particles, detergents, solvents, and other cleaning products into the storm drains can pose serious problems to our creeks and the Bay.

Public Involvement

In 1993, the City of Palo Alto participated in a County-wide program to develop Best Management Practices (BMPs) for food handling facilities. The draft BMP document was mailed to restaurant owners and operators for their review and comments. Prior to finalizing the BMP brochure, a workshop was conducted to obtain further input for a workable and useful BMP document. The final BMP brochure was mailed to all food handling facilities in the Cities of Mountain View, Los Altos, Palo Alto, and to those on the Stanford University campus. In late 1994, the Santa Clara Nonpoint Source Control Program completed a revised version of the BMP document in the form of a brochure and poster. The revised BMP packet was distributed by the County Health Inspectors to all food handling facilities during regular inspections.

Cleaning and Disposal Guidelines

The restaurant BMP document, which was prepared in the form of a brochure, contains detailed guidelines for cleaning equipment and disposal of waste materials. It recommends control measures to prevent the discharge of pollutants into storm drains and sanitary sewers, and provides guidelines for proper disposal of oil and grease, tallow, used cooking oil, and hazardous materials. A checklist is also provided to assist restaurant operators and managers with the implementation of the recommended BMPs.

Program Implementation

An updated mailing list of all food handling facilities was established as a vehicle for information exchange. County Health inspectors, during their regular inspections, will look for potential storm water and sanitary discharge problems and offer suggestions for remedial actions. Any major problems (such as those requiring structural changes) will be referred to City staff for further investigation.

In 1992, the Sewer Use Ordinance was revised to include requirements for installation of sewer grease traps or other grease removal devices at newly constructed food handling facilities and at existing facilities having grease discharge violations. It also requires all existing food handling facilities to install a grease removal device prior to January 1, 1997.

Additional requirements for new facilities are stipulated in the newly revised Sewer Use Ordinance provisions that took effect in January 1995, the most significant of which are the following requirements for new or remodeled facilities:

- Each facility must have a sink or other protected area for cleaning floor mats, large, equipment, and containers. This area must be connected to the sanitary sewer through a grease interceptor.
- After January 1, 1996, new construction must include a covered, bermed dumpster area.