

IS YOUR DRAIN A TRASH BIN?

📅 March 4, 2019

Just because something can go down a drain, doesn't mean it should. If it flushes, it doesn't mean it should.

Most homes and businesses in the Eagle River valley are connected to a sewage collection system. Thus, what goes down a local drain is destined for a [wastewater treatment](#) plant. These facilities are designed to remove organic material, nutrients, and disease-causing organisms before returning clean water that meets environmental standards to a natural water body. In our case, that's the Gore Creek and the Eagle River.

Wastewater facilities cannot remove everything that's sent down a drain. So, it's worth considering what goes in your laundry, dishwasher, bathroom or kitchen sink, toilet, shower, or floor drain.

Paying attention to what washes or flushes away is smart because wastewater ultimately becomes part of the freshwater supply and wastewater should flow unobstructed to a treatment facility. Don't pay attention or be careless with what goes down the drain and you're contributing chemicals, pharmaceuticals, grease, poisons, and more to our waterways while potentially causing a blockage in the pipe or a [sewer backup](#) into your home or business.

All sorts of stuff that shouldn't be there ends up in sewer mains and at one of Eagle River Water & Sanitation District's three wastewater treatment facilities. Have you ever put coffee grounds, cigarette butts, cooking oil, bandages, dental floss, cosmetics, salad dressing, egg shells, cotton balls, gravy, adhesives, hair, fur, meat trimmings, medicine, paint, peanut butter, plastics, cheese, or wet wipes down a kitchen sink, toilet, or floor drain? There's a better choice.

Here are some tips:

Food waste

Put it in the compost. Don't have access to compost? Food waste goes in the trash. Pour grease in a container, scrape food scraps into a bin, wipe pots and pans, then wash the dishes.

Cleaning supplies

Choose mild products and use just enough. Harsh chemicals can corrode plumbing and harm the wastewater treatment process. While cleaning products get diluted in the wastewater stream, chemicals survive in parts per million, billion, or trillion. Better to keep them out. For safe disposal, use Eagle County's [household hazardous waste facility](#).

Personal care products

Similar to cleaning supplies, choose mild ones and use just enough. Shampoo, soap, shower gel, exfoliating products, lotion, deodorant, toothpaste, sunscreen – the options are endless. Choose environmentally friendly products and use less.

Fats, oils, and grease (FOG)

Put it in the trash. Put it in the trash. Put it in the trash. **Fats, oils, and grease** ("FOG") coat the inside of drain lines, which constricts flow and can lead to a blockage or backup. Does your insurance cover sewer or drain backups? FOG coats the insides of sewer mains, too. That's why Eagle River Water & Sanitation District has a robust sewer system maintenance program that uses a jetting truck to clear mains on a 5-year rotating schedule. Some areas with many food service establishments require more frequent jetting. They shouldn't. All food service establishments should have a grease trap. If they're regularly maintained and working properly, FOG shouldn't be a problem in that area. FOG increases your cost for wastewater service because it causes maintenance and operational issues in the collection system and at our wastewater treatment facilities. Put FOG in the trash.

Wipes

Baby, disinfecting, bathroom, facial, cosmetic, personal hygiene, floor, or dusting wipes – put 'em in the trash! Wet wipes are designed to be stronger than paper towels, facial tissue, or toilet paper. But they don't break down in water (only toilet paper does). While wipes may flush, please don't. Wipes clog pipes, get stuck in mechanical processes, contribute to blockages and backups, and increase operational costs. Combine wipes and rags with FOG and you've got a [fatberg](#). Google it. Not when you're eating.

Medicine

Keep it out of the toilet. Keep it out of the trash. And get it out of your medicine cabinet when you no longer need it. Drop your expired or unused medications off at one of the [six permanent take back receptacles](#) in the Eagle River valley. Our local safe drug disposal partnership has worked together for more than ten years to get year-round disposal sites that are hosted by the Vail and Avon police departments, Eagle County Sheriff's Office, Vail Health, and Eagle County.

If you've been using your drains as trash bins, make some changes. Your behavior change can protect your pipes, our wastewater infrastructure, our community waterways, and our natural environment.

[News, Wastewater](#) [Fats, FOG, food waste, Grease, Oils, sewer backup, wastewater](#) [permalink](#)

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