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Stop Clogging Up Sewer Lines With Fats, Oils, and Grease, WMA Tells Restaurateurs

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The indiscriminate dumping of grease and oil by restaurateurs is contributing to the problem of backed up sewer lines, according to the V.I. Waste Management Authority.

WMA Executive Director Roger Merritt told lawmakers Thursday morning that the inappropriate dumping is a chronic issue in the territory. “We would like to remind the community and members of the viewing and listening audience to keep fats, oils and grease out of the sewer system,” he said, as he testified before members of the Senate Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning.

These substances, collectively known as “FOGs”, are the bane of sewer systems as they cling to the inside of drainpipes, building up over time until a blockage occurs that is exceedingly difficult

to remove. Once the sewer line is clogged, it “eventually causes overflows of untreated sewage into the environment or into your home,” Mr. Merritt said, which are “unpleasant and very expensive to clean up.”

Mr. Merritt was responding to a query from Senator Javan James Sr. about sewage backups in the town of Christiansted. Mr. James noted that issues with sewer lines are affecting business operations, particularly among tourism-focused properties such as the Caravelle Hotel. WMA authorities noted that some work has been done in the area to replace pipes. However, WMA engineer Alex Bruney said that business owners in the vicinity bear some responsibility for the condition of the system.

“You can jump on Waste Management when these things occur, but it’s a two-part process,” he argued. “Because those manholes in that area were filled with FOGs...it has to be the responsibility of the restaurant owners to ensure that they clean out their grease traps and don’t dispose of oil into the system.” Mr. Bruney told lawmakers that the area near the Christiansted boardwalk is particularly difficult to clean because of this issue.

Mr. Merritt said that WMA was embarking on an education campaign among restaurant owners to let them know that they are actually contributing to the problem. Meanwhile, the agency is playing its part by planning to build a used oil collection center at the Anguilla landfill, once the area is cleared up. WMA officials noted that a contractor had already been assigned to conduct the cleanup operation. There are also plans in place for used oil collection arrangements at upcoming convenience centers. Sen. James noted that the collection and safe disposal of waste oil on behalf of restaurants could be a business opportunity for an aspiring entrepreneur.

Senator Kenneth Gittens asked WMA to enhance enforcement activities to ensure restaurants are not inappropriately dumping the contents of their grease traps into the municipal sewer lines. In response to a query from Senator Marise James, Mr. Bruney noted that the fine for inappropriate dumping of grease traps is \$1000.