

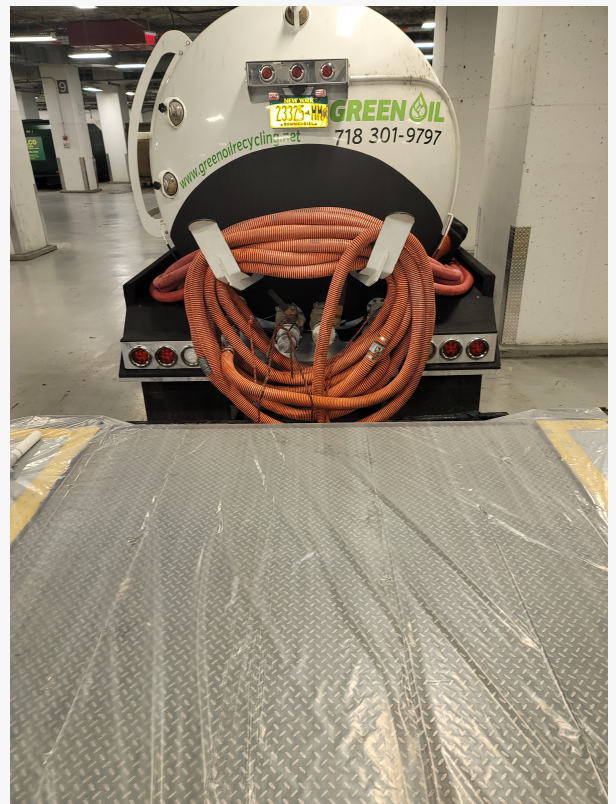
# Hidden Hazard: Neglected Grease Traps Plague NYC Restaurants and Waterways

*Hidden Hazard: Neglected Grease Traps Plague NYC Restaurants and Waterways. Dirty Grease Traps Clog Sewers and Threaten Environments in New York City*

NEW YORK CITY, NY, UNITED STATES, May 22, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- An unseen menace is lurking beneath the kitchens of New York City restaurants. In busy boroughs like Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, neglected restaurant grease traps are creating costly problems – clogging sewers, polluting local waterways, and straining public infrastructure. City officials warn that fats, oils, and grease (FOG) buildup from these traps is a leading cause of sewer backups and environmental damage across the city.

When grease traps overflow or are improperly maintained, the excess FOG doesn't just stay put – it often ends up in the municipal sewer system and can ultimately contaminate local water bodies. Grease entering rivers and bays forms a slick film on the water's surface, preventing oxygen from reaching aquatic life. "Many restaurant owners don't realize that pouring grease down the drain or ignoring a grease trap can wreak havoc beyond their four walls," said Michael Russo, a lead technician at [Green Oil](#). Improper waste oil disposal can result in sewage overflows that degrade water quality and harm wildlife. Environmental experts note that in addition to killing fish and plants, grease pollution can contribute to foul odors and unsanitary conditions in our waterways. The impact is felt close to home: New Yorkers living near polluted canals and rivers are increasingly concerned about water safety and quality.

Moreover, [grease trap cleaning](#) is not just an internal kitchen matter – it's a public responsibility mandated by city law. The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires all food-service establishments to install and regularly clean grease interceptors to keep FOG out of the sewer system. Failing to do so can lead to severe environmental consequences and hefty



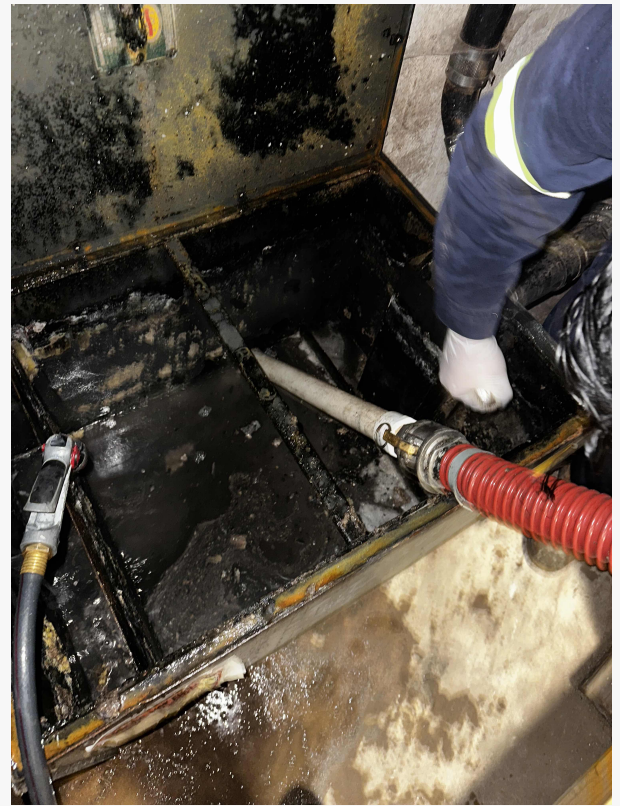
Green Oil Recycling Truck Picking up Waste Oil At The World Trade Center

penalties. “When businesses fail to comply and fat, oil, and grease enter the sewers, lines can become clogged, causing sewage to back up into basements of homes and restaurants. When that happens, the entire community suffers,” the DEP warns. In other words, neglected grease traps in one kitchen can become a neighborhood-wide problem.

The crisis beneath our streets is stark. The DEP identifies grease buildup as a major culprit behind New York’s sewer woes, noting that FOG clogs are responsible for well over half of sewer backups citywide. In fact, grease alone is blamed for about 60% of confirmed sewer back-ups in NYC – and when combined with wrongly flushed items like wipes, that figure soars to nearly 90% . These clogs often coalesce into “fatbergs,” giant solid masses of congealed grease and debris, which block pipes and sow chaos underground. In one telling example, city workers in 2019 extracted a nascent fatberg from a sewer line in South Jamaica, Queens, after residents experienced slow drains – a greasy mass of waste so large it was dubbed a “baby fatberg”. Fatbergs not only cause sewage to back up into streets and buildings, but they also damage infrastructure by overloading pipes and pumps with hardened grease.

For New York’s aging sewer system, which spans thousands of miles of pipes, these blockages are more than just a nuisance – they’re a recurring nightmare. Sewer backups triggered by grease clogs can flood restaurant kitchens and even household basements with filthy wastewater, damaging property and creating public health hazards. “We’ve responded to late-night emergency calls where a restaurant’s grease-clogged line caused raw sewage to overflow into the street,” said Emily Zhao, Environmental Compliance Coordinator at Green Oil. “It’s not just one business’s issue; it quickly becomes a community infrastructure issue.” Once a grease blockage causes an overflow, the waste can spill into storm drains and waterways, compounding environmental pollution. New York City’s sewer maintenance crews are in a constant battle to keep these fats and oils at bay.

Taxpayers ultimately foot the bill for New York sewer maintenance when grease-related clogs have to be cleared. City records show that cleaning out greasy blockages and so-called fatbergs is a multimillion-dollar drain on resources. The NYC DEP spends roughly \$20 million each year dealing with problems caused by grease and improperly disposed wipes in the 7,500-mile sewer system. In 2018 alone, the city removed some 50,000 tons of greasy debris from treatment plant filters and sewer lines – an effort that cost an estimated \$19 million that year. Those funds could



Green Oil Recycling Suctioning the Grease out of a Grease Trap at The World Trade Center

have been used to upgrade aging pipes or improve wastewater treatment, but instead are diverted to literally scraping fat out of the sewers.

Maintenance crews face difficult and hazardous conditions removing hardened grease obstructions. They often must manually chisel out fatbergs from clogged pipes in confined, unsanitary spaces. Each major grease blockage means deploying work crews, vacuum trucks, and sometimes shutting down parts of the sewer network for hours or days. “It’s a nasty job and an expensive one – and it’s totally avoidable,” noted Zhao of Green Oil. Officials stress that if restaurants and residents disposed of grease properly (never dumping it down drains), the city could redirect those maintenance dollars toward proactive infrastructure improvements. Instead, New York is stuck playing defense against grease clogs that recur with alarming regularity.

There’s also a punitive cost for businesses: violating the city’s sewer use rules by allowing grease to seep into sewers can result in fines up to \$10,000 per violation. City inspectors routinely check restaurant grease traps, and establishments that fail to clean and empty traps face not only plumbing emergencies but also legal penalties. In recent years, proposals have even been floated in the City Council to track and fine eateries for improper grease disposal. The message from City Hall is clear – the era of free-for-all grease dumping is over, and compliance is being strictly enforced to protect the public infrastructure.

As the dangers of dirty grease traps come to light, some local businesses are stepping up with solutions. Specialized environmental service companies like Green Oil are on the front lines of fighting New York’s grease problem. Green Oil, which specializes in grease trap cleaning and [waste oil pick up](#), works across all five boroughs to help restaurants properly manage their FOG waste. The company’s crews clean out grease traps on a routine schedule, safely haul away used cooking oil for recycling, and ensure that traps are functioning effectively – preventing that oil from ever reaching the sewers. “Our goal is to take the hassle out of grease trap maintenance for restaurant owners,” explained Jack Martin, Operations Manager at Green Oil. “We scrape the traps clean, remove every bit of sludge and waste oil, and dispose of it in an eco-friendly way, so the establishment stays in compliance and our sewers stay clear.” Green Oil crews pride themselves on being grease trap cleaning professionals first, not just oil haulers. This thorough approach means fewer emergencies and no foul grease odors wafting from neglected traps.

Beyond individual cleanings, Green Oil is trying to change the culture around grease disposal in NYC. Last winter, the company even declared January as “Waste Oil Awareness Month” for New York restaurants – a campaign to educate chefs and kitchen staff on the importance of proper grease management. Green Oil representatives held workshops demonstrating how regular grease trap cleaning and responsible waste oil recycling can save businesses money in the long run by avoiding fines, plumbing disasters, and downtime. “It’s cheaper to maintain a grease trap than to recover from a grease fire or a sewer backup,” Martin noted, highlighting the preventive savings. Notably, Green Oil works closely with Done Right Hood & Fire Safety, a New York-based kitchen exhaust cleaning and fire prevention company, to provide restaurants with

comprehensive safety and compliance services. This partnership means eateries can address grease buildup both below and above the stove – from the trap under the sink to the exhaust hood over the grill – ensuring a safer kitchen environment overall.

City officials and environmental advocates welcome these industry efforts. They emphasize that proper grease trap maintenance by businesses is a critical piece of protecting New York's infrastructure and waterways. "It's a win-win for everyone when restaurants do their part," said a spokesperson for the DEP. Regular restaurant grease trap servicing keeps New York's sewers flowing freely and reduces the risk of disgusting sewer backups on our streets. It also means cleaner local waterways, from the East River to Jamaica Bay, since less oily waste makes its way out of treatment plants into our rivers.

New York sewer maintenance crews are still working hard to retrofit old pipes and clear existing clogs, but they can't do it alone. The solution, experts say, must start in each restaurant kitchen. By investing in routine grease trap cleaning and adhering to proper waste oil disposal practices, the city's thousands of eateries can collectively make a huge difference. As Green Oil's technician Michael Russo put it, "New Yorkers love their pizza and fried foods, but we all hate fatbergs. Keeping grease out of the drain is something every restaurant can do to help New York City – it protects our business, our neighborhood, and our environment."

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