



Government of Bermuda

Ministry of Health and Environment

**Ministerial Statement to the
House of Assembly
by the Minister of Health and Environment
The Honourable Trevor G. Moniz, JP, MP
On 9th May, 2014
Update on the Disposal of Waste**

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity this morning to provide my Honourable Colleagues and the public with an update on the steps being taken to improve the methods used to dispose of sewage waste generated in and around the City of Hamilton.

Honourable Members will be familiar with the incidents over the last year which have resulted in what are being called "grease balls" coming ashore from the Seabright sewage outfall.

As the Minister for Health and Environment, one of my responsibilities is to assure that the bathing waters around Bermuda do not pose a public health threat.

Mr. Speaker, based on the results of water testing that has been done (and the results have been posted on the Ministry of Health web site) I can say with confidence that Bermuda's beaches are safe. The water quality meets the standards set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency - which is the standard that we measure ourselves against.

However, that does not mean that, as the regulator, I am content to have the operators of our waste disposal systems continue to operate as they have in the past.

It is obvious to me that improvements **MUST** be made.

To that end, I am requiring improvements to be made to:

- the amount and type of grease that enters the system;
- the operation of the disposal system, that is the pipeline leading to the outfall; and
- the processing of waste as it goes through the system.

Individual Behaviour and Reduction of grease at source.

Mr. Speaker, keeping grease out of the sewer is a legal duty for premises and establishments that are connected to the Hamilton sewerage system, regardless of whether they are inside or outside the City limits.

The Chamber of Commerce restaurant division and the City Engineer met together last week to have dialogue on the Fats Oils and Greases (FOG) policy and attendees were receptive to the need to implement greater controls on injurious sewage such as grease. Cities worldwide have policies to control Fats Oils and Greases and the need for better controls is not peculiar to Bermuda.

It is however, a critical issue for Bermuda right now, because whenever grease bypasses the Front Street screening station and combines with sewage in the City of Hamilton sewer-main, it can form grease balls that greatly increase the distance that contaminants can travel and increases the risk that it may be blown onshore and ruin Bermuda's image of pristine pink sand beaches.

Grease in sewers is not a new issue. Our fore-fathers prohibited its discharge into sewers in the 1917 Hamilton Sewerage Act. Greater effort to comply with these provisions to keep grease out of the sewers is what is required today.

Resources have been identified to work alongside the restaurants and the City of Hamilton to implement the FOG policy. Restaurants will be required to install grease traps and interceptors and to keep logs to assure that the required separation is occurring. The cost is estimated at \$500 per unit.

The Department of Health will introduce a portable meter and testing system that will monitor compliance by sampling establishment waste water. Noncompliance will result in action, and verification of FOG compliance will become a condition of annual food establishment licencing administered by the Department of Health.

The City of Hamilton provides collection of used fryer oil and will do everything it can to facilitate compliance with the FOG policy. Anyone connected to the City sewer system can contact the City Engineer with any questions.

Applicable establishments and premises will be expected to be compliant with the policy and with all provision relating to grease control in the Hamilton Sewerage Act by July 2014.

Documented verification of ongoing compliance will be required for the 2015 food establishment licensing period at the end of this calendar year.

Everyone who resides, works or uses a sink or drain in the Hamilton sewerage district which includes the City of Hamilton, West Hamilton, East Broadway, Berkeley, Cedarbridge and Cedar Park and Prospect housing neighbourhoods are asked to not put grease down the drain and instead make a concerted effort to scrape plates and put it in the trash, whether it is bacon grease or grease from deep cleaning appliances like ovens or fryers.

Even residents who live and work outside of Hamilton can contribute to this effort and do their part. When grease goes down the drain anywhere in Bermuda and causes a blockage, it is likely that the sanitation truck that removes that grease will put it into the City of Hamilton's sewerage system via the Tynes Bay septage facility. Grease is a Bermuda-wide problem to address and, as a first step, we must address it at source.

Improved Operations

Mr. Speaker, the City of Hamilton is vacuuming grease off of the waste water treatment plant wells at the Front Street screening plant as needed and multiple times every week. Daily checks on grease levels are being conducted.

Public Works is implementing the same regimen at the Tynes Bay septage plant and the City of Hamilton has agreed to share the use of their vacuum truck with Public Works to prevent their Septage Plant pumps from introducing grease into the sewer. The Ministry of Health and Environment is requiring both parties to log these activities to assure grease removal is optimized.

Ministerial instructions have been drafted by MoHE technical officers under the Public Health Act and the Clean Air Act to require improved performance in sewage plant operated by both City of Hamilton and Public Works requiring grease separation and sewage treatment. Performance targets and compliance timeframes are being fine-tuned.

The Tynes Bay Septage Plant improvement is a key component because the grease separated at source through the FOG policy will be delivered to Tynes Bay for disposal. It must not be returned to the sewer at this location.

Improved Technology

Mr. Speaker, the existing treatment systems at both Front Street and the Tynes Bay septage facility have been identified as strong candidates for re-engineering. Suitable rotary belt filters may be available in the medium term for placement in key parts of the system to improve grease and solids removal in an accelerated fashion, and as an interim measure, without having to wait for the possible construction of a new sewage treatment plant from scratch, which will take years.

Sewage treatment at the Hospital is scheduled to come fully online within the next couple of weeks. The Department of Environmental Protection is monitoring the progress of the KEMH waste water treatment plant via conditions in the Operating Licence issued by the Environmental Authority. This plant will remove solids and greases and, when added to the system, significantly dilute and improve the wastewater being discharged at the outfall.

Optimal Project Co-ordination and Communication

I will be convening a Bermuda Seawater Quality; Scientific, Technical and Advisory Committee or "STAC" committee to advise the Minister of Health and Environment and Cabinet on various short, medium and long term solutions to the south shore sewage outfall problem until these matters are fully resolved.

This committee will also advise on solutions to other seawater quality concerns that need to be addressed in order to protect public health and the image and tourism economy of Bermuda.

Inadequate sewage treatment is a complex problem because there are many stakeholders, and some medium and longer-term solutions could be years in the making. The establishment of a primary advisory group for the Cabinet on this matter should:

1. Signal that Bermuda is taking the matter very seriously.
2. Ensure that advice is given to Cabinet in a regular and coordinated fashion from a single trusted source.
3. Provide a forum for technical matters to be debated and resolved by scientists and engineers with recommendations on options streamlined for Cabinet decisions
4. Accelerate the process of moving chosen short, medium and long-term solutions into implementation.
5. Possibly de-politicize this national infrastructure matter.
6. Ensure that the "Most Appropriate Technology" is recommended to decision makers.
7. Regularly communicate progress being made to the general public.

Key Departments and advisors will be requested to send a representative to the STAC committee.

In conclusion, **Mr. Speaker**, Government, Municipal, QUANGO and Private Sector stakeholders are collaborating and taking a multi-pronged approach to reducing the grease going into the system and treating the waste as it moves through the system to the outfall.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.