



Ball of cooking grease blamed for sewer spill

By Keith Vass - Victoria News - April 30, 2008

A ball of cooking grease is the likely cause of a sewer overflow that sent human waste and toilet paper spilling into Bowker Creek last week.

The city began receiving calls shortly after 9 a.m. Friday reporting toilet paper and human waste floating in the creek, said spokeswoman Katie Josephson.

Engineering staff localized the spill to near the corner of Hillside Avenue and Doncaster Drive.

Though they initially believed the vitrified-clay sewer line had broken, it was later found that a blockage of used cooking grease appeared to have caused the pipe to back up and overflow.

“We do get grease blockages from time to time in our sewer system, however this plug ... I have never seen anything like it,” said pollution abatement officer Gary Pleven.

Pleven said the grease sealed a pipe leading from a box culvert meant to prevent sewer water from reaching Bowker Creek. As sewer water backed up, it built enough pressure to blow a plug that separated the storm sewer from the sanitary sewer.

“As soon as we removed that grease blockage, then the sewer was running fine again,” said Pleven.

Cameras were being used Monday to pinpoint where the grease had entered the system, but Pleven said nothing had been determined yet.

A Capital Regional District sewer bylaw requires restaurants to have “grease interceptors” on sinks, dishwashers, garburators and floor drains. If the grease is traced to a restaurant, the business could find itself on the hook for repair costs.

The CRD can fine repeat violators, but usually starts with education on first offences,

Pleven said. If continued violations lead to damage, the city can seek to recover the cost of repairs and has done so several times.

“Once informed, the obligation is on (the restaurants) to minimize the grease so as not to cause any problem in our system,” he said.

Bowker Creek should be considered contaminated and avoided from the point of the spill down to its outfall in Oak Bay, near Glenlyon school, said Dr. Richard Stanwick, chief medical health officer for Vancouver Island.

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