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Break the Sludge Cycle

Larry Rothman

Restaurant Plumbing Maintenance

Understanding the basics of restaurant plumbing maintenance

Grease, sludge, sand and debris are the main causes of restaurant drain line blockages.

In day-to-day operations, commercial kitchens and some businesses can generate substantial amounts of grease, which can accumulate and solidify in sewer lines. And if the plumbing system backs up, it can leave you wallowing in sludge, potentially resulting in a loss of business and property damage. If sewers are not correctly drained or are left untreated, backups could be a recurring problem.

Getting Proactive

Sewer line backups can be reduced, and possibly eliminated, through quarterly or annual preventive maintenance service by qualified plumbing service professionals. Preventive maintenance programs typically involve cleaning the drain lines with a "snake" machine, followed by a degreasing or enzyme treatment to keep lines free-flowing and prevent emergencies.

For lines that receive heavy amounts of grease, high-pressure water jetting is recommended to thoroughly clean the lines. Today's equipment will scour the lines with 4,000 pounds of water per square inch (psi) and remove even the most stubborn buildup to minimize the chance of future blockages.

Regular preventive maintenance service allows technicians to identify and correct problems before they become emergencies. They allow restaurant operators to project and budget drain cleaning expenses and reduce costs associated with emergency service. Preventive maintenance programs also allow operators to schedule service at times that are convenient for each restaurant, such as before the business opens in the morning, after it closes in the evening or during off-peak times.

A trained service technician should perform periodic inspections of drain lines and sewers, and identify any necessary repairs due to wear and damage. Special high-resolution video cameras allow technicians to look inside pipes ranging from 3 to 36 inches in diameter. Problems such as grease buildup, leaks, broken pipes and obstructions can be pinpointed and corrected by qualified service professionals.

Grease traps, septic tanks, sand pits, catch basins and other liquid-waste receptacles should be professionally pumped and vacuumed regularly to ensure proper operation. Most townships and municipalities require grease traps to be maintained in order to comply with local sanitary and health codes. A qualified professional will provide operators with all the necessary manifests for the proper disposal of the grease and liquid waste.

Your plumbing professional should inspect and test any backflow prevention devices to comply with state laws, usually once each year. Failure to comply can result in interrupted business and substantial fines. Backflow inspections and repairs may be done only by state-certified technicians.

Ongoing Maintenance

General maintenance guidelines for foodservice operators include keeping screens over all floor and sink drains, placement of trash receptacles in restrooms, proper use of garbage disposers and toilets, disposal of grease in cans, disposal of large food particles in trash containers and employee training. Additionally, harsh chemicals should not be used in drain lines and grease traps. These products damage the lines and reduce the

effectiveness of drain treatment products.

It is important to select a reputable plumbing and drain service professional who can provide comprehensive service, including emergency service, preventive maintenance programs and drain treatment products. Many service professionals will provide free inspections of other plumbing systems, such as toilets and water heaters. Your service professional should be fully trained, licensed and insured, and provide written guarantees on any work performed.

Preventive maintenance programs are important because they help reduce the risk of interruption of business and the need for emergency service. Costs for such programs are fixed, and budgeting is easier on the restaurant operator. A quality maintenance program gives operators one less thing to worry about.

For additional information regarding the basics of restaurant plumbing, design and layout, please join us for our Restaurant Plumbing 101 webinar on Friday July 20 at 11 a.m. ET (10 a.m. CST/9:00 a.m. MT/8:00 a.m. PT). We will also include tips regarding plumbing and drain maintenance, safety and preventive maintenance.

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