

## Grinder Pump Frequently Asked Questions

### What is a grinder pump?

A grinder pump is a pump unit located at a low point in your house or in your yard where the wastewater drains from the house that grinds the wastewater up and pumps it to the nearest gravity sewer in the public street.

### What should I do if my grinder pump alarm goes off?

If there is too much flow going into your grinder pump unit, the high sewage level will automatically trigger an alarm horn and light to alert you of the problem. In many instances, the problem could be an excessive amount of flow to the grinder pump. You should take the following steps:

- Immediately discontinue your water use to prevent an overflow.
- Turn off the alarm by turning key on the side of the control box. The alarm horn should silence but the light will remain on until the grinder pump is repaired.
- Wait fifteen minutes before taking further action. A high level of water usage will sometimes cause the alarm to come on. This situation is self-correcting. If the pump is operating correctly, the wet well will automatically be pumped down and the alarm light will turn off.
- If the alarm light is still on after fifteen minutes, **contact the WPCA at (860) 267-2536 or 860-4142** if your system is publically owned. This number is also listed on your alarm box. If your grinder pump system is privately owned, you will need to contact a licensed plumber or the supplier of the pump to resolve the problem.
- Never attempt to open the tank cover or the electrical panel box. CAUTION: Electrical shock or damage to the system may occur.

### What should I do if there is a power outage?

Your grinder pump is powered by electricity and will not function during a power outage. In order to prevent waste from backing up into the lowest sink, tub, or toilet in your home, severely limit the interior use of water until power is restored. This means do not shower or wash dishes and limit flushing the toilet. Remember: "If it's brown flush it down, if it's yellow let it mellow".

While your holding tank has a limited capacity (typically 6 toilet flushes), if the system was already full and ready to pump just before the power went out, there will be even less storage available.

### How does a grinder pump work?

Wastewater from your home flows down your drains and collects in a holding tank. When the wastewater in the tank reaches a certain level, it automatically activates the pump to grind up your sewage into small particles, much like a garbage disposal. The pump then generates enough pressure to push the wastewater up the hill through your sewer line to the sewer main.

## **Why do I need a grinder pump?**

Wastewater normally flows downhill by gravity through the sewer system. However, gravity service is not available to your property. Your residence may be at a lower elevation than the sewer main, requiring the use of a pump to force the wastewater up to the gravity sewer main.

## **Who is responsible for maintenance of my grinder pump?**

A limited amount of the grinder pumps located within the Town of East Hampton are owned and maintained by the WPCA. In some instances, grinder pumps were installed by developers and are privately owned or have been turned over to the property owner. If you do not know if your grinder pump system is publically or privately owned, contact the WPCA at (860) 267-2536. If your grinder pump system is privately owned, you will need to contact a licensed plumber or the supplier of the pump for maintenance.

The WPCA currently maintains 92 publically owned grinder pumps. For your safety, never attempt to open the control panel or the grinder pump tank. If your system is publically owned, do not have it serviced by an outside contractor.

It is your responsibility to maintain access to the pump control box and the pump chamber and make sure there are no landscape plantings obstructing access. The DPW will not be responsible for any damage to landscaping or other items while performing any maintenance function.

## **What can I do to protect my grinder pump?**

A properly maintained grinder pump should be able to handle wastewater from the kitchen, bathroom, laundry, etc. However, some chemicals and substances can adversely impact a grinder pump and may cause safety hazards. Please check the labels on all chemicals before using or disposing. Never connect a sump pump to the grinder pump.

**CAUTION:** never put any of the following materials into sinks, toilets or drains as they can clog your home system and create unsafe conditions in your lines and tank:

- Cooking fat, lard, oil or grease
- Clothes-underwear or socks
- Rags or disposable floor wipes
- Degreasing Solvents
- Cigarette butts
- Dental Floss
- Sanitary napkins, tampons or diapers
- Q-Tips & Cotton Balls
- Sanitary wipes and baby wipes
- Hair clippings
- Cat litter
- Strong chemical, toxic, caustic, or poisonous substance

- Explosive or flammable materials
- Glass, metal, wood, eggshells, seafood shells, coffee beans, aquarium rocks or gravel
- Plastic Objects
- Rubber gloves or other disposable gloves
- Fireplace ashes

It is not advisable to plant flowers or shrubs or place such items as fences, decorative pilings, fish ponds, etc. within the immediate area as damage to the pump, underground electrical or piping systems may occur. Electrical power and alarm wires are buried under the ground between the control panel and the tank. Before digging in the area, you should call to have a technician locate the lines.

Older grinder pump models have a small breather vent located on the side of the tank, just below the cover. It is important to keep this vent open and free of debris such as mulch or grass, for the unit to remain operational. It is also helpful to have the ground sloped away from the tank so water will not pool and enter the vent rendering the unit inoperable.

### **What should I do with my pump when I go on vacation?**

If you plan on being away for several days, replace the wastewater in the tank with clean water to help minimize odors. First run water from an inside faucet long enough for the grinder pump to start working. After the pump starts, turn the inside faucet off. The pump will run until the tank is empty and shut off automatically. This process will cleanse the pump and leave it filled with a minimum of clean water. Always leave the power to the pump on.