You've tuned in to another edition of The Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work everyday. Hosted by the City of Saint Augustine's Communications Director Melissa Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events and now your host Melissa Wissel.

Welcome to The Break Room. Thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine. I have invited back to the break room this week, Kevin McGinnis. He's one of our

environmental compliance

inspectors. Kevin was here
back when we talked about fats,

oils and grease but we missed
out on talking about backflow

preventer and illicit discharge
practices. Kevin, welcome back.

Thank you for having me back.
We were on a roll talking about

fat soils and grease. Half the
other program we wanted to talk

about backflow prevention,
illicit discharge. We didn't

get to it. So, here we are.
Let's start with backflow

preventers. I don't really know
what that is. I can imagine,

which basically means you're
preventing backflow. Is

this residential? Is this
commercial? A little bit of

both. It's a little bit of
is a little bit of both and

basically it is what the name
implies. Uh backlog preventers

are installed on your
waterlines for certain

situations. Most commercial
restaurants and some

residential irrigation systems.
If you have a dedicated

irrigation meter they're
installed on those also but

basically it does what the name
implies. Uh it prevents water

potentially contaminated water
from backing from a business or

a residence into the main water
supply. So it's into the main

water supply not necessarily
backflowing into my house or

into my business. So it is
possible to go from your

business to your next door
neighbors or a couple next door

neighbors. And if you're a large
industrial plant or something

like that it can contaminate a
couple blocks if not more. So

it definitely helps protect
your neighbors. It may not

necessarily protect you because
that's where it's coming from

but it will definitely protect
the main water supply for

everybody else. Is it a flap or
a valve on a like a particular

part of the pipe? I mean, what

is it? I'm still

trying to visualize. Yeah,
there's couple different types

of 'em. The basic, most basic
one is called a dual check and

basically, it's just like a
metal flap in your pipe

that lets water, it flips up to
let water flow one way and then

it, if water tries to reverse
and go back the other way, it

closes and blocks it off. And I
said that's the least

protective one but they're the
one for the high hazard ones

are reduced pressure. Okay so
those are a lot better than the

dual checks. And do you inspect
those or those are just things

that you have to keep an eye on
to make sure that businesses

have. We have to keep an eye on
them. The Department of

Environmental Protection and
the City of St. Augustine has

an ordinance that we have to. We
don't inspect them but we have

to have the company or the
business has to have somebody, a

certified inspector come
inspect them and submit a

report to us once a year for
commercial accounts for

residential irrigation accounts.
it is biannually or I'm sorry

every two years okay and then so
if I'm a homeowner I don't have

an irrigation system. Do I have
any type of a backflow

prevention mechanism somewhere?
You may have you may have

depending on what meter water
meter you have, you'll

have the dual check. Okay.
Those are in pretty much all

the new meters that are going
in. Uh if you have an

irrigation system on your
house, the contractor that

built the house, sometimes they
put them in to protect your

house water from the irrigation
system water if there's ever a

problem like that. Okay. But
those we don't require to be

inspected. Does this have
anything to do with like when

my toilet backs up at all or is

that totally different problem?

That's totally different
plumbing system. Yes, that's a

different plumbing system.
Okay. That's your sewer system.

Okay. Uh these are on your
potable water. Say you're

drinking water or whatever. So,
just to give you an example of

what a backflow preventer would
protect the water supply from.

So, this is a very simple
example but say you're washing

your car and you stick the hose
in a bucket of soapy water. Mm

hmm. While that hose is running
in that bucket of water, say

there's a water main break or
there's fire and they open some

hydrants. There's the
possibility of that water in

that bucket being sucked back
into the water supply. So,

that's what a backflow
preventer prevents. I would have never envisioned
that or imagine that. That's a

great example. Another one of
my favorite ones is those

fertilizer bottles that you
connected in your house. So, if

you're out there with one of
those and you get a phone call

and you put that down, your
water is still on, you may have

shut the valve off for the for
the spray for the for the

fertilizer but that valve is
still on. So, again, if

something happens with the

water pressure, that fertilizer

can be sucked back into your
water supply. I would never

think about that. Do you now,
okay, so let me ask you this as

like an environmental guide. Do
you use those type of things or

you like, oh, never going to
use that because I wouldn't

want to run the risk. No, I
never use em. Okay. And we try

to totally different
conversation about pesticides

in the environment. Yeah. Uh
I'm building a house right now

and we're going to try to make
as much non, I guess what do you

call it? Yeah. Not having
anything that we need to

irrigate or fertilizer
pesticides. As green and as

environmentally sound as you
can be. Well, that's exciting.

Yes. Well, I bet you have a lot
of really cool green program

type things going on with that
build. Yeah, for sure. That's

really cool. Well, that's
another one of those I guess I

would never think about that
but if you're trying to be

green and those type of spray
bottle things that you stick on

the end of your hose kind of to
me that would fall into the

flushable wipes category or the
flushable toilet cleaning

materials where I've talked to
Glabra in the past where

flushable does not mean
biodegradable so stay away.

If they're used correctly it's
okay to use them but yeah they

need to be used correctly. If
you're just now tuning in you

are listening to The Break Room.
I have Kevin McGinnis with me,

he is one of our environmental
compliance inspectors we're

talking about backflow
preventer. But we also are

going to switch gears a little
bit and talk about illicit

discharge which sounds dirty.
Yeah. It is but really illicit

Discharge is this dirty stuff
that goes into the sewer

system? Basically, not the

sewer system but more the storm

drain system. Okay. Basically,
we always talk about only rain

down the storm drain. So, we do
not want anything other than

rainwater down the storm drain.
So, we're talking about I guess

greasy and sudsy water rehab
restaurants that that do but

should not. Mm hmm. Uh take
their kitchen mats out into the

parking lot and rinse them off
there. Gotcha. They use soap

and water and on those mats,
you're going to have food

particles and all kinds of oil
and stuff like that and if they

do it in the parking lot and it
reaches a storm drain, that's

an illicit discharge and we
definitely don’t want. Okay. That

stuff going into our waterways.
So, a little bit of finger

wagging to those restaurants
that take their floor mats out

and hose ‘em down in the back
alley and nobody's looking.

Absolutely. There should have a
spot in the restaurant that is

routed to their grease trap
where they can do that and

where that water will go. So it
does not go into our okay so

really they would have a place
to do that. So it's not like

they can't be hosing down their
mats. It's just that there

should be a designated place in
the restaurant that goes to

that drain like we were talking
about last time that drainage

into the fat soils and grease
going down that drain in the

middle of the kitchen. Yes they
definitely should have one just

for that so. So I have a vision
of a big sudsy icky bucket of

gray water from a restaurant.
Where do they pour those

down those drains too? Is there
a sink? That shouldn't go

outside either. That should not
go outside either. They should

have a mop sink. Okay. One
designated sink for that. That

is routed to grease traps so it does
not go into the storm water.

Into the storm water yeah. And

as a resident we have

responsibilities too for
illicit discharge. So let me

ask this. If I blow my driveway
off because I don't want to

have to rake up all those
leaves and grass debris and I

just sort of push it right down
into my gutter. That's not

really good either. That is not
really good either. Shame on. I

don't really do that. I bought
a lawn mower with a bag just to

let you know that. You guys
converted me. A mulching mower

or a lawn mower with a bag is
probably the best thing to

have. Uh if you do not do that,
then rake up the leaves. Uh we

have lawn leaf bags or if you
just want to use regular bag,

just bag it up. Uh our solid
waste crew comes every

Wednesday to pick all that
stuff up. They'll dispose of

that properly. We ask lawn
companies and homeowners to if

they're going to use a leaf
blower to blow it out of the

street back onto your lawn. We
do not want it going down the

storm drain. Uh leaves block
the storm drain for one which

causes street flooding. We have
enough of that without. We have

plenty of that and felt leaves
in the drain. It doesn't take

much. I used to work when I
started with the started on the

stormwater crew and we would
get called away from a job just

to our streets flooded our
streets flooded so we would go

there and all it would be would
just be a thin layer of leaves

on top of their storm drain.
You get a shovel, shovel it off

and these drains are fine. So
that's why we tell people keep

your leaves out of the storm.
Out of the storm drain. I

wouldn't always and I'll be
honest. I've said

this on this the program
before. I've learned so much

from the folks down at the
wastewater treatment plant and

the water treatment and you're

down at the wastewater

treatment plant but just about
some of those best practices,

you don't really think anything
of it. Oh, I'm just going to

blow a couple of these grass
clippings and leaves into the

street. I don't want it on my
driveway but if I've just

bagged my whole lawn, why not
go ahead and blow it back in.

Yeah. And it's good for
your lawn. So, it's going to

decompose and help fertilize
your lawn. You mentioned the,

let me ask you this. You
mentioned the paper bags. You

said, we have them. Does the
city have bags or do we just

encourage folks to go to Home Depot, Walmart? They're like $4 a pack of 5 or something. Yeah, you can do that or we have a recycle. We usually have our recycle events where we pass out bags to people for them to use. Okay and paper bags better than the plastic of course because. That's definitely better than plastic. Still keeping with our green theme.

So, the other thing about leaves and grass clippings going down the drain. When they enter the waterways, it's too much extra nutrients in the waterway, that's what causes all your algae blooms and your dead zones stuff like that. So

that's another reason why we
want to keep as much organic

material out of our storm
drains as possible so. And that

really explains some of that
trickle down no pun intended

but that trickle down effect
even if it gets through the

storm drain and it's not
clogging the drain it's still

impacting our waterways. It
definitely impacts the

waterways yeah we fish in it,
we swim in it, and that's the

last thing we want is to have
algae blooms that are killing.

Oh yeah. The fish and the
manatees and stuff like that.

You don't want to be swimming

in that and so yeah. It's

definitely more environmentally
friendly to keep it on your

lawn. So. Kevin, you're a
wealth of environmental

expertise and knowledge. I
don't know about that. You

keep, you definitely are
keeping us green and clean.

You're keeping our businesses
in compliance. We're trying to.

So, we appreciate all the
things that you do down there

and you've mentioned there
are two of you and you guys

keep a really busy schedule. If
you're a homeowner and you have

questions about any of the
discharge or things we've been

talking about. If you're a
restaurant owner and you have

questions about the grease
traps, backflow preventers,

anything we've been talking
about, of course, you can check

out the website and look up the
wastewater treatment plant and

Kevin and Caroline will come
and give you some tips and hints

on how to keep us green.
Absolutely. Thank you for

coming by. I'm going to have
you back again. Okay. Alright.

As we wrap up another edition
of the break room, I hope we

answered your questions. If we
didn't take a minute to drop an

wmail to info @citystaug.com.
We want to keep you

informed about what's happening
in and around the city and most

importantly that you hear it
here from the people doing the

work and making it happen every
day. Remember that in order to

stay connected, you need to be
connected. Be sure to follow us

on our social media platforms,
you'll find us on Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram @CityStAug and we thank you as

always for tuning in. Until
next time.

You've been listening to The Breakroom, a
weekly program addressing

projects and programs offered
by the City of Saint Augustine.

Join us each week as the city's
Communications Director Melissa

Wissel has in-depth
conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet
the needs of our community. The

Break Room is produced by
Communication Specialist for

the City of Saint Augustine,
Cindy Walker. See you at this

time next week for another
edition of The Break Room.