[Narrator] You've tuned in to another edition of The Breakroom, a weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the City of Saint Augustine's communications director Melissa Wissel. The Breakroom 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.

[Melissa] Welcome to The Breakroom. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the City of St. Augustine. Thanks for tuning in. This week, I'm sharing The Breakroom with Kevin McGinnis.

He is the city's Environmental
Compliance Inspector. Kevin,

it's been a while so we are
glad to have you back. [Kevin] It has

been a while. So, thanks for
having me back. [Melissa] So, your job

title is Environmental
Compliance Inspector. It sounds

very fancy and like you have a
very important job. Tell us all

about it. [Kevin] Okay. Um I am one of
three of the inspectors plus

our managers who our department
has four total. Um my main

responsibility is what's called
the Cross Connection and control

program. Uh that basically is
the backflow prevention,

backflow preventer [Melissa] right?

[Kevin] Program. So, that's my main

job. [Melissa] And what is it back? So,
when somebody says backflow

preventer, I can imagine to me
it sounds like it stops, it

prevents backflow. [Kevin] Yes. [Melissa] But is
that my sink, my toilets, my

house, what it, where is that,
or is it commercial? [Kevin] Um it's

commercial and some residential
but the residential is all

irrigation. So, we'll go over
that second but. [Melissa] Okay.

[Kevin] Basically, backflow preventer
is what you think it means. Uh

it prevents any individual
water customer from having

their water come back into the
main water supply and

contaminated somehow. [Melissa] Okay. So,
contamination is really.

[Kevin] Contamination. [Melissa] Avoiding
contamination. [Kevin] That's the main

thing is avoiding contamination
so. [Melissa] And how is it something

that you do like every week,
every month? Is it an annual

[Kevin] testing is annual for the
commercial businesses for

residential irrigation. It is
every 2 years. So. [Melissa] Do I have to

make an appointment for that?
[Kevin] No. Uh you actually get a we

don't do it here at the city.
We don't do any testing. You

have to get a certified
backflow preventor tester.

[Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] Which is a private
company. I think we deal with

like sixty of them. So there
are plenty of companies around

that will do the testing for
you. [Melissa] Okay and you do you

inspect the commercials? The
commercial properties? [Kevin] All the

commercial properties and all
the like I said, the

residential residential has
irrigation. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] And most of

those, they'll separate the
your potable water and your

irrigation water. So, you'll
have two separate meters at

your house and if you do have a
separate meter for your

irrigation, that has to have a
back flow preventer on it. [Melissa] Okay

and then, do you have to keep

records? You have to report it.

How does what's what is all of
it mean, I guess? [Kevin] That is

basically the biggest job is
record keeping. So, DEP which

is the Department of
Environmental Protection so

I'll be using DEP a lot so
that's who they are require us

to submit a report every year
about all backflow preventors

how many have been tested how
many there are how many

commercial there are how many
residential there are okay so

what they want to know is how
many backflow preventers we

have in the city they want to
know they want to see a test

report for each one of those
backflow preventers and we have

a little over 2,300 backflow preventers in

the city. So, it's quite a bit
of paperwork. Um. [Melissa] 2 thousand

300 backflow preventers. [Kevin] As of
right now. [Melissa] Oh my goodness. [Kevin] As you can imagine

with all the development we
have, we have a lot more going

in every day. So, it's yeah,
it's quite a bit of work. [Melissa] And three

people could handle that? [Kevin] Well,
it actually three people can

handle that but it's basically
my responsibility to do that.

[Melissa] Okay, the reporting. [Kevin] So, most
people are pretty good about

setting theirselves a reminder
to get it tested every year.

Some people aren't as good at

that. So usually twice a year

if we have the time we'll send

out letters to the people that

need to have their backflow preventers tested. Which could

be anywhere from three, four,

500 letters. [Melissa] Wow. [Kevin] Twice a year.

Uh of those three, four, 500

letters, we usually get a 60%

response rate. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] So of the

40% that we don't get, we have

to send out second notice

letters. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] So there's

another couple hundred letters.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Kevin] Um and then when all

those test reports come in, I

have to enter into a

spreadsheet. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] And keep

track of everything. [Melissa] And

report, are we, are we a, are
we, are we in a, let's see,

what am I trying to ask you? Do
we get an A in our grading for

that? Is it something that's
measurable like good, bad,

medium, how do how do you
measure our, what would that be

considered success? [Kevin] I don't
know how DEP would grade us. Um

I would say we are medium
because like they said, usually

we are anywhere From 60 to 70%
of passing test reports

throughout the year. Um The
other 30% like I said are

either failed backflow
preventer testing testing that

never got retested. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] So
they passed or people just did

not respond. [Melissa] Gotcha. And then
they have to replace or repair

and all that. [Kevin] Yes and if they
do replace one or repair one

they have to that's another
part of my job. If they replace

one they have to get in touch
with the environmental

compliance department to make
sure that they are replacing

the backflow preventer with the
correct type. [Melissa] Gotcha. [Kevin] Some

People have the incorrect
backflow preventer line rate

now and they replace it with
the same thing so it's wrong so

they have to contact they're
supposed to contact us. [Melissa] Right.

[Kevin] Before that happens before they

do that. But again sometimes

they don't do that. And I will
get a test report and the

reason to fail is it because it
is the incorrect type of

backflow preventer. [Melissa] Gotcha. So
I have to go back out there. I

have to reinspect and let the
customer know to install the

correct ones. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] It's a lot
of roadwork [Melissa] Lots of lots of in and

out. Yeah, I pass you a lot in
the hallway. Coming and going.

Coming and going. [Kevin] Very busy.
Yes. [Melissa] So, backflow preventers is

one component. What other, I
know, we're talking about

environmental compliance. So,
obviously, this is things that

we're doing to keep things
clean and green and avoid

contamination and one other
thing we've talked about in the

past is illicit discharge. [Kevin] Yes,
that is another one of our

responsibilities in illicit
discharge and basically that is

essentially any potential
pollution that could make it to

the city's stormwater system.
So, just to give you an

example, one of the illicit
discharges we had probably last

year, somebody painted their
porch roof with latex paint.

[Melissa] Oh. [Kevin] Right before a day before a
rainstorm. So, the rainstorm

washed all that paint off of
the porch roof. It ran down the

driveway into the street and
into the storm drain. [Melissa] Oh my

goodness. [Kevin] That is a good
example. [Melissa] So how so what do we

do like okay so follow that up
if you can like so what is that

what do we do? Do they get
reported? Do they get a fine?

It's just. [Kevin] Um we were we were
contacted. Luckily it was

during the rainstorm so it had
not all washed off yet. So I

went out there and dammed up.
They had a gravel driveway so I

damned up the. [Melissa] Oh wow. [Kevin] The
driveway to stop it from coming

into the street. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] And then
they were contacted and. [Melissa] Yep.

[Kevin] So they had to do a little

cleanup. But luckily it was

latex paint. Latex paint is
water based. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] So it's not

quite harmful as oil-based
paint in our waterways so. [Melissa] And

I guess if folks don't realize
it, what ultimately happens is

everything does flow into the
Matanzas. [Kevin] Yes. [Melissa] And people don't

necessarily realize that. Just
because it's down the street

drain, they think it goes out
of nowhere but it's. [Kevin] Yeah, a

lot of people, I don't know if
this is still true if it's a

lot of people but they used to
be tied together. The storm

system and the sewer system
used to be tied together in a

lot of places but that isn't
the case now. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] Like you

said, it goes directly to our
waterways, to the rivers, to

the marsh, to the creeks. So
yeah, we always say only rain

down the storm drain. [Melissa] Right.
[Kevin] So. [Melissa] And even that we've talked

about too the when you're
blowing off your leaves. Even

though you think oh it's
natural. It's leaf. We really

want to avoid everybody blowing
all of that into the street.

[Kevin] There are multiple problems
with blowing your leaves into

the street. Uh the first one is
street flooding. It does not

take very much leaves to cover
Storm drain and flood your

street. So, the other reason we
don't like grass or leaves or

anything going down the storm
drain that puts a lot of

nutrients into our waterways
which is bad which can lead to

algae blooms and stuff like
that. So, as much organic

material that we keep out of
our stormwater system that

leads to our waterways, the
better. So, we always ask

people to blow their leaves or
the grass back into their yard.

Uh best thing to do is use a
mulching mower. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] That'll

chop up and just deposit it
back into your yard but Yeah.

Try to keep your street clean

if not for the waterways but

for your street for flooding.
[Melissa] Yeah. Yeah. [Kevin] We have a lot of

problem areas in the city where
people don't do their leaves

back into their yard and it
will flood their street and

we've been caught out there
multiple. Well, I used to work

for the stormwater department
driving the big vac truck.

[Melissa] Right. [Kevin] So, I used to be called
out to certain areas of the

city that would be have their
storm drains covered and all it

would take is just for me with
the shovel just to scrape the

storm drain real quick and.
[Melissa] Yeah. [Kevin] That eliminates the

flooding so. [Melissa] I think people
don't realize that although we

have the sunny day flooding
problem and and all of this you

know problem with our
infrastructure. Sometimes it

can be just as simple as don't
let your leaves clog up the

drain. [Kevin] Yeah and then if I lived
on a street that flooded and I

had a storm drain I would sure
be out there making sure that

storm drain is clean. [Melissa] Yeah.
Only rain down the drain. [Kevin] Yes.

[Melissa] If you're just now tuning in
you're listening to the break

room. I'm Melissa Whistle
communications director for the

City of St. Augustine and this
week I have Kevin McGuinness in

studio. He is our environmental
compliance inspector. And a few

other things to talk about we
were talking about your

backflow preventers, illicit
discharge, but you also are you

are you work with the fats,
oils, and grease program and I

know that's usually a Glabra
topic but let's get a little

bit into fats, oils, and grease
before we run out of time.

[Kevin] Okay. Um basically we go to all
the restaurants in the city. Um

which there's probably little
over 300 maybe 320 330

restaurants that we have to
keep track of. So that's a lot

of grease traps. [Melissa] That's a lot of

restaurants. [Kevin] Yes. So basically

one of the things we do when we
get there we open up the grease

trap. We tape it take a core
sample. We have a little we

have actually for the big ones
we have a thing called a

dipstick pro which is about a
six foot long pole a clear pole

that you dip down in the
grease trap. Uh you pull a

little valve that traps the
water and the grease and the

solids and we pull it up and we
can look at the amount of all

of those things just by looking
at the pole. [Melissa] So kind of like

putting a straw in your cup
when you put your finger on top

of it and you lift your.
[Kevin] Basically that's it. [Melissa] Okay. [Kevin] So

and all the grease will rise to
the top. The water will be in

the middle and all the solids
like food particles, stuff like

that will be at the bottom and
then, we, if you have more than

20 percent capacity in your
grease trap, you're considered

out of compliance so it needs
to be pumped out because once a

grease trap reaches 25 percent,
it usually, this basically

quits doing its job and just
lets grease through. So, that's

why we have it at 20 percent.
[Melissa] If only some of us at our

houses could know how much
grease running down the drain.

[Kevin ]Yeah. [Melissa] Which we're not supposed
to do.

[Kevin] Yeah, when we do our outreach, we always talk to
people about their homes. Try not to put people always think
it's just grease like bacon

grease or something like that
that shouldn't go down the

drain but it's salad dressing,
it's mayonnaise, it's ketchup,

it's dairy products. Anything
like that. It's called the

fats, oils, and grease
programs. So, anything with

fats, oils, or grease should
not go down your drain. [Melissa] And

that's that whole I Think if I
recall that's the how a a

clogged pipe in a picture can
look like a clogged artery and

you don't necessarily know the
difference. [Kevin] No. [Melissa] Right. [Kevin] It's

basically the same thing. [Melissa] It's
the same exactly. [Kevin] Yeah, grease

is just nasty stuff for your
body or for pipes so. Yeah.

[Melissa] Only rain down the drain, only
water down your sink. [Kevin] Yes. [Melissa] And

soap. [Kevin] And soap, yeah. [Melissa] Um Kevin,
we are about out of time and I

hate to say it because we still
have to talk about lab work and

sewer spill sampling. So, I'm
going to save that for another

day If that's alright with you.
[Kevin] Yeah, that's fine. I'd be happy

to come back. [Melissa] And thank you for
coming. The Environmental

Compliance Inspector Kevin
McGinnis, we will have you

back to talk to us about all
the things that we do to keep

our city in compliance. [Kevin] Okay,
thank you. [Melissa] Thanks, Kevin. You

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what's happening in and around

the city and most importantly
that you hear it here from the

people doing the work make it
happen everyday. Follow us on

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Until next time, thanks for
tuning in. [Narrator] You've been

listening to The Break Room, 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
communication specialist for

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

time next week for another

edition of The Break Room.