

The Break Room with Jordan Neisler, Environmental Compliance, December 30, 2025

Narrator:

You 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 every day 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.

Melissa Wissel:

Welcome to *The Break Room* thanks for tuning in I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the city of Saint Augustine. This week we have a first timer joining us she is our environmental compliance inspector Jordan Neisler. She is here I would say in lieu of Glabra Skipp. Glabra usually comes on and talk about fats oils and grease and we have a new talent with us Jordan welcome to *The Break Room*.

Jordan Neisler:

Thank you for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

I we can chuckle that our station manager, Dan, thought that you thought it was interesting that you were here instead of Glabra so welcome we are happy to have you. Fats, oils and grease this is a great time of year to be talking about it. We've got the holidays lots of people cooking and making all that yummy greasy whatever. Tell us about fats oils and grease from your perspective being our first timer on here.

Jordan Neisler:

yeah so obviously with the holidays coming up there's a lot of family in town hosting a lot of gatherings cooking a lot of meals. Our restaurants are super busy especially with Nights of Lights so we see a very high uptake in fats oils and grease content on that goes to the wastewater treatment plant.

Melissa Wissel:

so not down your sink is what we're talking about we don't want you pouring the stuff down your sinks.

Jordan Neisler:

Yes, So fats, oils and grease, it's not just your oil that you're thinking of or your high fat like hamburgers and hot dogs and greasy food like that it's also your butter product. So when you're like baking an apple pie or when you're making ice cream sundaes or let's say you're making a homemade salad dressing all of those have a very high fats oils and grease component and if you pour them directly down the sink even with hot water it's still going to clog those pipes.

Melissa Wissel:

The hot water really only makes it liquidy at that moment.

Jordan Neisler:

At that moment yeah that water cools down very very quickly which people don't realize so that is a very common myth that that hot water will clear that grease it really won't it'll resolidified quite quickly down the line and cause some clogs and it can cause a lot of costly overflows and backups and it's just smelly and a headache.

Melissa Wissel:

There you go and you and I were talking before too about. The the flushing toilet flushing before we get on to toilet flushing let's let's talk about what are the other parts about the fats oils and grease. Is the grease traps excuse me an inspections that you do at

restaurants you kind of just touched on restaurants talk to us a little bit about your job as the inspector going around to the restaurants.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah so every food service establishment so it's basically everyone with a 3 compartment sink within the city of Saint Augustine service area. They're required to have a grease trap and so they come in all different shapes and sizes for this scenario I'll tell you to imagine a manhole let's say and so first I'm going to roll up with my truck pop that manhole steel toe boots of course got to be safe and then I have a device called a dipstick pro and essentially I put that into the manhole and I'm taking a core sample of what the contents of the grease trap. At that course sample then I take it out and I'm looking at the ratio of water compared to oils and fats and then also the ratio of solids.

Melissa Wissel:

where is this manhole let's say is it in the restaurant in the kitchen outside the restaurant?

Jordan Neisler:

so it can be in the restaurant or it can be outside. They are. In Saint Augustine we have a very limited footprint especially downtown so sometimes restaurants have to get a little creative where they put them but as long as they have one and as long as I can access it during normal business hours we're good to go.

Melissa Wissel:

that's where everything drains to?

Jordan Neisler:

yes so all of their 3 compartment sink so when they're doing their dishes and that nature all of that is going into the grease trap and. Kind of think that as a middleman between the restaurant and our wastewater treatment plant so it's catching all of that grease and oil and solids and like food particulates that we don't want going further down the line to clog the pipes.

Melissa Wissel:

so let's then talk about OK so you don't want us pouring it down the drain where should we be storing it or saving it and what do I do with it once I have it. In that glass jar?

Jordan Neisler:

Yes, So for households we go by the motto cool it can it trash it so. When you're cooking bacon grease or sauteing or you just have you know some like leftover just greasy material make sure it's cooled beforehand you don't want to be dealing with hot grease don't want any burns I personally take like a reused can so like old black bean can something of that nature and I have like one of those reusable can toppers and so I will pour my grease into that I'll put that little Topper onto it and then I'll put mine personally in the freezer so it doesn't smell so it will harden in there, doesn't smell, it doesn't attract bugs cause it's completely sealed anytime I'm cooking I'll take it out. And once I fill it up then I can just take that can and throw it directly in the trash. So it never has to go down the drain at all it can just go to the trash so that's the best way to dispose of it.

Melissa Wissel:

and the I'm gonna just say you're Talking about the. Little resealable can Topper great stocking stuffer or holiday little gift if you're celebrating Hanukkah either one you have a little gift. It's. Good idea. If I don't want to freeze it and throw it out we also have a recycling event we'll talk about the recycling event so you can also save it for that once I if I do manage to get it down the drain and it goes through the wastewater treatment plant how is our wastewater treatment plant impacted by that?

Jordan Neisler:

So it can definitely cause some issues for us down at the wastewater treatment plant. Fats, oils and grease are a pretty big issue so we try to siphon them out if they are lucky enough to get to the wastewater plant a lot of times it will get clogged in the pipes before it makes it there and cause some disruptions and some sanitary sewer overflows and so we really want to prevent those so that's why we have the grease traps at the establishments and that's why we do outreach like this to educate people on what to do because they can cause some nasty disruption.

Melissa Wissel:

Nasty Disruptions. If you're just now tuning and you're listening to *The Break Room* I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the city and this week we have Jordan Neisler she's our environmental compliance inspector talking about fats, oils and grease. Holidays make sure you're saving that cool it can it trash it. Lets also talk about our toilets flushing the toilets. The wastewater treatment plant is where everything goes to think every you and I were just saying every resident needs to go to the wastewater treatment plant. Talk to me about flushing what's flushable isn't necessarily biodegradable.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah. So just because you can flush something doesn't mean you should. So I like to tell people when I'm giving tours if you could flush a golf ball down your toilet does that mean you want to flush a golf ball down your toilet? Probably not

Melissa Wissel:

shouldn't do that

Jordan Neisler:

Shouldn't do that. so that's the same thing with paper towels feminine products. Flushable wipes is a huge one they say flushable but again it's anything can really be flushable if it's small enough but it's not designed to degrade in our sewer system so it's going to cause really bad clogs or something we refer to as a rag monster and so essentially when it does eventually get to a wastewater plant it will get in a giant ball with all of the grease and trash and then we have to manually remove that and so that's very costly we have to shut down the treatment process to kind of do that whole process and it's a very stinky, smelly job and it's just it's no fun yes definitely a dirty job.

Melissa Wissel:

One of those dirty jobs.

Jordan Neisler:

Definitely a dirty job.

Melissa Wissel:

Explain to our listeners if you would like so when we say you flush this flushable wipe it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to biodegrade it's going to run through the system talk to me a little bit about. How the wastewater treatment plant works and ultimately all that water that gets processed goes back into?.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah the Matanzas River yeah so it's a really cool process the first step of the process once it gets to the plant is a physical removal process so anything that was flushed down the toilet that shouldn't be we try to physically remove that first and so we have a giant band screen and that takes out all those large trash particulates and then we also have grit removal cell so all of those like coffee grinds, corn, little stones they get caught in it So that removes those as well so.

Melissa Wissel:

there's nobody standing there with a sifter at the end it's all manual I mean it's all automated machinery right?

Jordan Neisler:

It's all automated yes and it goes into a dumpster and then that gets hauled off from that point on it goes into something called a BTU which is a biological treatment unit and so we essentially use microorganisms to treat our wastewater and so they love oxygen and we feed them a lot of oxygen and Stir up that water. And then they do their job and they eat that waste and. They do a really good job and so it's kind of a very nice thing we do where we don't have to use like any chemicals at that point we just are using those microorganisms.

Melissa Wissel:

So we're using science to clean our water scientifically to clean it not chemically if you will

Jordan Neisler:

yeah and so we once the large waste has been removed by those microorganisms it goes to a settling basin and so essentially that just acts as Like a holding tank so then the microbes they still have life in them so they sink to the bottom and then they get put back into the basin because they can eat more waste.

Melissa Wissel:

recycled

Jordan Neisler:

yeah yeah we used and recycled and then from that point on the water gets put into a contact basin and that's where we do put in Amount of parasitic acid which is think of it as like a very strong vinegar so we don't treat our wastewater with chlorine because then we would have to dechlorinate it and that can be costly and has some byproducts so we just use peracetic acid we were one of the first municipalities to use it so it's really awesome that we use it and we just.

Melissa Wissel:

Just like a strong vinegar.

Jordan Neisler:

yeah like a strong vinegar blend think of it as that and then the biggest thing I tell people is at the wastewater treatment plant we are not sterilizing the water we're just disinfecting it so we do not want to put a completely sterile water into the Matanzas River because the matanzas river is a very important living water body and so if you want to put a sterilized. Product into it it would really disrupt that ecosystem so by treating it with the parasitic acid treating it with the microorganisms were taking really all of the bad harmful stuff out but it's still a living breathing water and so it's treated it's treated yeah so all of the bad stuff is out but it's perfectly fine to Swim in and fish in and do all those fun stuff that we Floridians doing.

Melissa Wissel:

It it almost would to me as you were describing it would almost create like a dilution. In in a sense like you're by putting in something that's a sterilized water like that you're adding something that's creating an imbalance.

Jordan Neisler:

yeah foreign to the environment so we want to mimic the natural environment and we're constantly testing it to make sure it's within the correct parameters.

Melissa Wissel:

Now I tell people all the time if you haven't been to the wastewater treatment plant and I'm I really am not kidding. Can a can a resident if someone 's driving home today and they go I want to go see the wastewater treatment plant can they do that and they can we can schedule a tour or they could right I mean anybody can go down there and you can't just show up?

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah, I wouldn't just show up.

Melissa Wissel:

We would encourage folks that they can call in if they're curious we can schedule a tour.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah we've done public tours in the past. Currently we do a lot of tours with local colleges and elementary schools so a lot of students of that nature but we have given public tours in the past

Melissa Wissel:

Neighborhood Associations?

Jordan Neisler:

so it seems like yeah definitely something to think of we could probably schedule something like.

Melissa Wissel:

And we like to do that during city government week sometimes or environmental awareness. Week which is in April yes so. Before we wrap. Up I mentioned at the beginning of the interview Glabra Skipp used to come on and we used to joke about oh it's the fats oils and grease episode she is now our Deputy Director and you're our environmental compliance inspector. Give me a little. Bit of a background actually before I ask you about you and I may have to not get to talking about you we have a recycling event coming up that we've got to remember to tell our listeners about so before we talk about you. I'm so sorry. OK tell us about the recycling event.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah so Wednesday January 7th. 2026 from 7:30 AM to 2:30 PM over at Francis Field we are having a recycling event so at this event you can drop off used cooking oil so if you did a fish fry or Turkey fry save that oil and bring it on down also we're taking electronics so holiday lights car batteries old laptops if you get a new laptop bring us your old one just no TV 's and no hazardous waste.

Melissa Wissel:

No paint, no tires

Jordan Neisler:

no paint no tires

Melissa Wissel:

no light bulbs.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah no light bulbs you can do holiday light strands but no household lightblubs.

Melissa Wissel:

if you're recycling in your recycle bins don't put those holiday light strands in those bins those are tangles.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah do not put them in the bins you can drop them off either at that Wednesday January 7th event or you can drop them off anytime at the solid waste facility. So you just have to call beforehand and let them know that you're coming to drop some used electronics off and they will happily take them off your hands.

Melissa Wissel:

and this is tell me again is it at the by Francis Field

Jordan Neisler:

Yes by Francis field.

Melissa Wissel:

By Francis Field, it's the little drive through there we call.

Jordan Neisler:

Yep 25 West Castillo

Melissa Wissel:

We call it the dental building but it's that little drive through. used oil if you get some great new electronics bring us your old ones no TV 's computers yes monitors.

Jordan Neisler:

Yeah we can do the computer monitors.

Melissa Wissel:

Computer monitors. But no TVs. All right and real quick you graduated from Flagler

Jordan Neisler:

yeah I got my bachelors at Flagler so fun being back here at the radio station yeah and then I got my masters at NYU

Melissa Wissel:

and your masters is where you got into your environmental

Jordan Neisler:

yes correct so my bachelors from Flagler is in strategic communication. My masters is in environmental public Health Sciences so I'm kind Doing what I love right now getting to communicate about science

Melissa Wissel:

yeah telling our listeners we appreciate the work that you do keeping us clean keeping our our pipes clear. Fats, oils and grease don't pour it down the drain. Your toilet is not a trash can and we're out of time thanks for Coming down.

Jordan Neisler:

yeah thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

if you missed any part of this episode and want to go back and listen from the beginning you can find us on your favorite. Podcasting apps we have a complete listing of our platforms at CityStAugRadio.com we want to keep you informed about what's happening around the city and that you hear it here from the people who do the work to make it happen every day follow us on social you'll see us on Facebook Instagram and X @CityStAug 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 see you at this time next week for another edition of *The Break Room*.