

**Town of Sturbridge  
Grinder Pump Policy  
Homeowner's Guide to Grinder Pumps**

**Why do I have a grinder pump?**

The low pressure sewerage system servicing your home is part of a larger Town of Sturbridge Wastewater Collection System. The grinder pump in your yard is an important part of the system that carries sewage to the Wastewater Treatment Plant operated by the Town of Sturbridge and Veolia. In areas which cannot be served by gravity flow, pumps are used to pump sewage into a pressurized pipe which outlets downstream to the gravity section of the system.

A grinder pump system requires the homeowner to take a more active role than required by a homeowner served by gravity sewers.

It is important that you know how your home sewer system operates and that you notify the Sturbridge DPW – Sewer Division, operated by Veolia, if a problem occurs. The unit servicing your home is maintained by the Town of Sturbridge.

With your cooperation, your low pressure system will provide years of safe, reliable service. Please read the following information on the proper use, emergency procedures and special situation guidelines.

**How to protect your system**

The grinder pump can handle any wastewater that is normally discharged to the sewer from the kitchen, bathroom or laundry. Some chemicals and materials may cause operating problems or safety hazards. It is advisable to check labels on chemicals prior to disposal. Never connect a sump pump to your sanitary plumbing.

The most important homeowner precaution is to avoid introducing foreign objects into the system. Foreign objects are anything other than normal sewage, toilet paper, and garbage disposal throughput. Never put any of the following materials into sinks, toilets, or drains:

- Glass, metal, wood and plastic, seafood shells
- Fish tank gravel, kitty litter
- Dental floss
- Diapers, baby wipes or general cleaning wipes, sanitary napkins or tampons
- Socks, rags, or cloth of any kind
- Any strong chemicals, toxic, caustic or poisonous substances
- Gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, paint thinner, paint
- Antifreeze, lubricating oil or grease
- Cooking fat (lard, oil, grease)
- Degreasing solvents

These materials can damage the grinder pump, cause blockages, or may create unsafe conditions in your home pipes and tank and lead to corrective service costs.

### **Repair and Corrective Service Costs**

Many service calls have been made to unclog grinder pumps which have not been utilized properly. **Costs for excessive service calls or abuse of any kind are not included in the sewer rates and it is therefore necessary to recover all costs associated with repairs to grinder pumps due to improper use. Please expect to be billed for corrective service calls including all pumping services, materials and labor expenses.**

### **Technical Details**

A fiberglass sewage holding tank has been installed underground on your property, and a sewage grinder pump is housed in the tank. The tank cover is the only part that shows above ground. **DO NOT BURY YOUR GRINDER PUMP UNDERGROUND OR GRADE/SLOPE SURROUNDING SOIL TOWARDS THE HOUSING AS IT WILL DAMAGE THE PUMP.**

Pumps that are buried will not be repaired until the home owner exposes the tank and brings it up to grade permanently. Pumps are not allowed in any other structure except the E-1 Housing. Owners/customers who do bury or grade to the pump must pay all expenses related to fixing the pump and extending the cover beyond the existing finish grade to the bury line marked on the tank.

All of the wastewater from your home flows into the E-1 tank. When the tank fills to a pre-set level, the grinder pump automatically turns on, grinds the waste, and pumps it out of the tank via the sewer service pipe and into the public sewer system. The grinder pump normally will run for one or two minutes and automatically turns off when the tank is emptied. During a typical day the pump may turn on and off 20 to 30 times.

The pump is powered by electricity and is connected to the breaker panel in the basement and a control panel on the outside wall of your home. The property owner is responsible for the plumbing and electricity from the house to the tank canister. The cost of the electricity is paid by the property owner, not the Town of Sturbridge.

### **If you have an alarm....**

Your grinder pump is designed to produce an alarm signal in the event of a high water level in the pump basin. If there is a grinder pump failure, the tank which contains the pump will become too full. You should:

- Check the breaker in your home that controls the grinder pump panel control box. If the breaker is tripped, reset the breaker once. If the problem persists, please contact us at the number listed below. The proper size breaker is 30 amps to run the pump. In the

event our technician determines the problem is either the breaker, and/or an electrical issue in the home, it is the homeowner's responsibility to retain a licensed electrician.

- Discontinue water use to prevent overflows and sewage backups into your home. Wait fifteen (15) minutes before taking further action. A high level will sometimes cause the alarm to come on. This situation is often self-correcting and the tank will automatically be pumped down.
- If fifteen (15) minutes have passed and the alarm light is still on, or if you continue to get an alarm during the next few pump cycles, please contact us at **(508) 347-2513** during normal business hours (Monday – Friday, 7a.m. – 3:30p.m.) or at (508) 347-2525 after normal business hours.
- Never attempt to open the tank cover.
- Our technicians will repair the grinder pump or advise you if there is an electrical alarm failure which is your responsibility to have repaired.
- If the horn is sounding on the alarm panel you may silence it by pushing the button located underneath the panel. The alarm will silence but you must still report the problem. The warning light will remain on.
- Absent any extraordinary circumstances, pumps that fail after dark will be changed out the next morning beginning at 7:30 a.m.
- Blockages or pipe breaks that occur between the home and the E-1 housing are the responsibility of the homeowner. The Town is responsible from the E-1 housing out to the sewer main.

If you observe an alarm you should call for service. Do not ignore intermittent alarms. Intermittent alarms are a sign of pump wear and should be attended to promptly. Doing so may avoid more costly repairs at a later date.

### **Special Conditions – Power Failures**

If there is a power failure which affects your home your grinder pump will also lose power and be unable to operate. The grinder pump tank has a small amount of holding capacity but interior water use should be severely limited until power has been restored. The Town cannot guarantee backup generator power during prolonged outages and it is highly recommended the homeowner have a backup generator to run the grinder pump.

People with Town water service will still have water during power outages. However, if the grinder pump is without power water use during the outage can lead to overflows and sewage back up into the home which is the responsibility of the homeowner.

## **Storm Preparation**

If a major storm is predicted what can I do to help prepare if I have an E-1 Pump?

- Stake out the pump housing before any large snow event.
- If you have a generator make sure it is in working condition and has sufficient fuel available.
- Once the storm comes try and clear your pump cover outside as this will reduce down time if an emergency repair is needed. If a repair is needed it is the responsibility of the home owner to clear a path to the pump not the Town.
- While you still have power run the water in your home until you hear the pump kick on. Once you hear pump running shut off all water including laundry.
- You will now have an estimated 40 to 50 gallons of storage should you lose power.
- Once this storage is used up the system will start to back up to the house or overflow to the ground. If you overflow to the ground then the pump will suffer damage as a result.

## **Vacations**

If you will be away from home for several days, the following steps should minimize any problems:

- Replace the wastewater in the tank with clean water to help minimize odors. To do this, run water from an inside faucet long enough for the grinder pump to begin running. (You may need to go outside near the pump and listen to verify it has started running.) Repeat the process.
- After the pump starts, turn the inside faucet off. The grinder pump will run until the tank is nearly empty (3-4 inches) and will shut off. This process will cleanse the pump and the pipes; leaving the tank filled with a minimum amount of clean water. This will also help to minimize odors that could accumulate during vacation.

Remember to always leave the electrical power to the pump on.

## **Winter Shutdown of Grinder Pumps**

Seasonal sewer users are eligible to submit an application each year prior to October 31<sup>st</sup> to receive a seasonal sewer rate during the months of October through March. During this period of time the home must be fully winterized and will be disconnected and inspected by the Sewer Department to ensure that the property is not used during this period. The Sewer Department will open the secure housing for the pump and disconnect the pump to

the sewer system during the winter months. ***If the pump is used during this period, it may flood the pump housing and damage the pump. The property owner will be responsible for any damages caused for unauthorized use or negligence during this period.***

In the spring, the Sewer Department should be called to arrange for the pump to be reconnected during their normal business hours.

Applications for winter shutdown of grinder pumps can be found on the Town's website at [www.town.sturbridge.ma.us](http://www.town.sturbridge.ma.us) or at the Sturbridge Finance Department located in the Town Hall.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

**VEOLIA WATER (Monday – Friday, 7AM – 3:30PM): (508) 347-2513**

Non-business hours call Emergency Dispatch: (508) 347-2525