



## GRAVITY AND GRINDER PUMP USER GUIDE What You Need to Know

### WHAT TYPE OF SERVICE DO I HAVE, GRAVITY OR GRINDER PUMP?

The City wastewater (WW) system has both traditional gravity sewer mains and low pressure mains with individual grinder pumps on customer properties. Grinder pumps are often required because the hilly terrain doesn't work with a traditional gravity WW system. If you have a new WW connection, the New Connection Form identifies whether you are a gravity or grinder pump customer. If you are a new customer with an existing WW connection, you can look on your property to check whether there is grinder pump equipment visible (a metal mushroom vent lid) or call the City Wastewater Manager at 512-610-6837 or go to WW Program page on the City website at [www.westlakehills.gov](http://www.westlakehills.gov) and check your address on the City WW Collection System Map to find out whether you are a gravity (red dot) or grinder pump (blue dot) customer. The WW Program page also includes more information about the program and who to call for billing and service calls.

If you are a gravity customer, you are responsible for maintaining the service line from your house to the tap. If you are a grinder pump customer, you are responsible for supplying power to the grinder pump, maintaining the discharge line from the house to the grinder pump, proper use of the grinder pump, and providing access to the grinder pump if it needs to be serviced. The City is responsible for maintaining the grinder pump control panel, pump and tank, as well as the service line from the pump to the tap. The City also maintains all gravity and low pressure mains, as well as three lift stations that pump wastewater to Austin. WW customers pay for all maintenance costs through their monthly bills. Shared costs are incurred should your grinder pump or control panel need to be repaired or replaced outside of the warranty period. These shared costs are split 50/50 between the resident and the City as per Utilities Wastewater Fees Amendment 380, Code of Ordinances Appendix A Fee Schedule Article AS.OD Utility Fees Section AS.001,m.

The majority of customers have grinder pumps. The pump is located inside a buried and sealed tank. The tank collects all wastewater that flows from showers, sinks, lavatories, floor drains, and any other plumbing fixtures. When the wastewater in the tank reaches a preset level, the grinder pump is activated. It pumps all water from the tank and also grinds up any solid matter in the tank into small particles. This slurry is pumped from the tank into the City WW collection system and to a City of Austin wastewater treatment plant.

### DO'S AND DONT'S FOR ALL CUSTOMERS – CARE AND USE OF YOUR GRINDER PUMP

You can help ensure the reliability of the City WW system (and your grinder pump) and help keep WW system maintenance costs lower by following a few simple guidelines:

- ✓ Flush sewage only. Drain gray water only into sinks and drains.
- ✓ Avoid putting oil, grease, and food scraps into your sink. Put oil, grease, and food scraps into separate containers. Rinse dishes in cold water before putting them in the dishwasher. Cover sink and floor drains with screens and empty debris into trash cans. **If your grinder pump fails and excessive grease is found, you will be billed for FULL repair/replacement costs.**
- ✓ Prevent prohibited materials from going down toilets and drains. Prohibited items include but are not limited to: diapers; baby wipes or cleaning wipes (even if advertised as "flushable," they may not be "dispersible," and may not dissolve in water); sanitary products (e.g., napkins, tampons); socks, rags or cloth; metal or glass; plastic objects (e.g., toys, utensils); seafood or egg shells; kitty litter; goldfish stone; coffee grounds; explosives; flammable materials; strong chemicals; lubricating oil and/or grease; floor stripper; construction debris; abrasives; or grit. If prohibited items are disposed, they may clog your service line and/or damage your grinder pump. **If your grinder pump fails and prohibited items are found, you will be billed for FULL repair/replacement costs.**
- ✓ **FOR ANY REPAIRS OR REPLACEMENT CONTACT CROSSROADS AT 512-246-1400. NEVER HIRE A PRIVATE PLUMBER TO MAKE ANY REPAIRS ON YOUR GRINDER PUMP AS IT GOES AGAINST CITY CODE 18.03.105 AND YOU WILL BE FINED.**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

### **Will my grinder pump work if the electrical is either turned off or knocked out during a power outage?**

No, the grinder pump will not function properly without electrical power. Without electrical, the grinder pump tank could fill and possibly overflow and cause a sewage spill. If someone turns off a breaker or a breaker trips, turn it back on to restore power to the grinder pump. Make sure contractors do not turn off electrical to the grinder pump. During a power outage, limit your water use as much as possible. Flush toilets only when necessary and don't wash clothes, use the dishwasher, or shower/bathe until power has been restored.

### **Does my grinder pump have an alarm?**

Yes, all grinder pumps have a visual alarm and newer models have both visual and audible alarms. If either alarm is activated, you should immediately contact Crossroads Utility Services, the City's maintenance and operations (M&O) company at (512) 246-1400 and limit your water use.

### **When can I call for service?**

24/7 but you can help keep M&O costs lower by calling our service provider, Crossroads, at (512) 246-1400 during regular business hours (Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.), if possible. Overtime rates apply to evening, weekend and holiday calls. If your alarm goes off, *always* cut back your water use and check your electric breakers (to make sure the pump was not turned off accidentally). If there is an overflow, *always* call immediately.

### **How can I tell if my grinder pump is working?**

You may not be able to hear or see your grinder pump working because it is enclosed in a sealed tank. If the grinder pump is not working, the alarm (light or light plus audible) should go off. Sewage may stop flowing from your property and may back up into low areas such as yards, bath tubs, showers, or toilets.

### **Am I responsible for paying for grinder pump repairs?**

You are responsible for maintaining the service line from your house to the tap. If you are a grinder pump customer, you are responsible for supplying power to the grinder pump, maintaining the discharge line from the house to the grinder pump, proper use of the grinder pump, and providing access to the grinder pump if it needs to be serviced. The City is responsible for maintaining the grinder pump control panel, pump and tank, as well as the service line from the pump to the tap. The City also maintains all gravity and low pressure mains, as well as three lift stations that pump wastewater to Austin. WW customers pay for all maintenance costs through their monthly bills. Shared costs are incurred should your grinder pump or control panel need to be repaired or replaced outside of the warranty period. These shared costs are split 50/50 between the resident and the City as per Utilities Wastewater Fees Amendment 380, Code of Ordinances Appendix A Fee Schedule Article AS.OD Utility Fees Section AS.001,m

### **What happens if the pump is running non-stop?**

If the pump appears to be running non-stop, immediately contact Crossroads Utility Services. Limit your water use as much as possible.

### **Does my grinder pump require any routine maintenance?**

Grinder pumps are typically designed to be maintenance free but they do eventually wear out and require replacement. A grinder pump that is operated properly can last 5-10 years or longer.

### **Can my contractor move the grinder pump or service line or can I move it? Can I bury the grinder pump tank?**

No. If you hire contractors for projects including but not limited to remodeling, sprinkler system or other yard work, or tearing down and rebuilding your house/office building, *tell them you have a grinder pump which includes dedicated electrical service and an underground low pressure service line that runs from the pump to the street.* Do not tamper with or move the grinder pump. Do not build over the service line. Do not bury the grinder pump. The top of the tank needs to be accessible if repairs are needed. Also, the grinder pump tank lid needs to be exposed to the atmosphere to allow the tank to be vented. Typically, a mushroom type vent is provided on the top of the tank to allow air into and out of the tank. The top of the tank must also be above ground level to prevent storm water and dirt from washing into the tank. Call the City and get a permit prior to doing any work that involves the grinder pump, grinder pump control panel or service line. Any modifications must be performed with a permit. Any damage caused as a result of working with or without a permit will be billed to the customer.

### **What if I am going on vacation or the property will be vacant for a period of three days or longer?**

If the property is going to be vacant for several days, cycle clean water into the grinder pump tank by filling and draining a bath tub full of clean water. Repeat this process twice to ensure that the grinder pump will be sitting in clean, less corrosive water while the property is unoccupied.