



JEFFCO H₂O NEWS

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Attack of the Fatbergs



A close up view of a fat-clogged sewer line.

Maybe they are not quite as dramatic as the 10-ton bus sized fatberg that threatened to shut down part of London's sanitary sewer system last year, but Jefferson County's sanitary sewer lines also are plagued by blockages, courtesy of [cooking oil and grease](#) that wind up in kitchen sinks. Jefferson County has the responsibility to collect, transport and treat sanitary sewage/wastewater generated by 480,000 residents. Wastewater is collected from homes and businesses in a system of pipes which carries it to a wastewater treatment plant for cleaning before being released back into waterways. Unlike wastewater, stormwater runoff from yards, streets and parking lots drains to a separate system of pipes which empties directly into waterways without being treated. Wastewater is generated from activities such as flushing toilets, taking a bath or shower, washing clothes, preparing food, and cleaning. Day after day, year after year, this wastewater passes through Jefferson County's 3,100 miles of sanitary sewer lines and is pumped by 170 pumping stations to 9 wastewater treatment plants. These treatment plants have a total capacity to treat 199 million gallons of sewage per day. There's a lot that goes on in the [treatment process](#), but here's the short version: Sewage is screened, separated, aerated, filtered, and disinfected to meet state water quality standards before the resulting treated water is finally released into local waterways. Sanitary sewer lines are made to accept only wastewater, human waste and toilet paper. Anything else put into the system can cause some serious problems for homeowners as well as County maintenance crews. Personal care products such as wet wipes flushed down the toilet or cooking oil and grease poured down the sink can create blockages in the lines and cause sewage overflows. An easy way to prevent problems is to dispose of personal care products in the trash and recycle cooking oil and grease. Jefferson County offers a free and convenient [recycling program](#) with 20 drop off locations. Do your part to fight the fatbergs and keep the pipes beneath your feet running smoothly!

What's Happening?

Birmingham Botanical Gardens Fall Plant Sale - October 17 - 18 - Shop for herbs, sustainable trees, fall annuals, shrubs, natives, perennials and more! Call 414.3950 or visit www.bbgardens.org for details.

Community Awareness Day - October 22 - Hosted by Jefferson County EMA, exhibitors will be set up in the Highway 280 Summit Shopping Center parking lot to answer your questions about preparing for extreme weather and other emergency situations. Jefferson County Storm Water Management staff will be there to distribute mosquito prevention kits and other resources. Call 254.2039 for more information.

Free the Tree! - When the holidays are over, you can keep your cut tree and greenery out of the landfill and give them a second chance by [recycling](#) them. The resulting mulch has many uses, including landscaping local parks, schools, and other public areas.

Blue: It's the New Green



For years, 'green' has been the buzz word for all environmentally friendly practices. But recently, attention has zeroed in on water resources, and with good reason. Environmental and economic experts predict that by 2050, more than half of the world's population and economy will be located in areas which will experience severe long term water shortages, placing human health, food supplies, and economies at risk. Whether you buy into these predictions or not, the western US currently is experiencing a [drought](#) which already has cost states, businesses and residents billions of dollars. Here in Alabama, we are fortunate to average 54" of rain each year, but even we have recently experienced periods of drought that reduced our water supply and restricted its use. And water quantity isn't the only issue. That abundant rainfall we usually experience picks up pollutants from the ground and washes them into waterways. In fact, [*stormwater runoff*](#) is the #1 source of pollution in US waterways. So it makes sense to implement practices that protect our rivers, creeks, lakes and streams from polluted runoff and other sources of pollution. The top two practices to consider are reducing the [amount](#)

of stormwater that leaves your yard and preventing [pollutants](#) from coming in contact with stormwater. Adopting some of these ideas can help make our future blue.

The Fab Four



Even though the growing season is winding down, there are some things that are best done in the fall to prepare for spring and all of the lawn and garden activities that it brings. (1) PLANT. Fall is the best time for [planting trees](#), shrubs, and many other plants because this is the time of year that many plants enter a period of dormancy and can focus on establishing their root systems in preparation for spring. Planting a tree is a great choice for reducing the amount of stormwater runoff that leaves your property. It's estimated that during a single growing season, one large tree can absorb as much as 11,000 gallons of water from the soil and release it back into the air through its leaves. (2) SERVICE. Fall is also a good time to assess, clean and service your [lawnmower](#) and other lawn and garden equipment. This includes cleaning or replacing air filters, changing sparkplugs, changing and recycling oil, properly emptying fuel, and having blades sharpened and balanced. Thoroughly clean, sharpen and oil hand tools before storing for the winter. (3) TEST. Before applying any fertilizers or lime to your landscape, first test the soil in your yard. The [soil test](#) results will help you purchase and apply just the right product in the correct amount. (4) MULCH. One of the best things that you can do for your landscape any time of the year is to apply organic mulch to garden beds. Some of the benefits organic mulch will bring to your landscape include stabilizing soil temperature, retaining soil moisture, adding nutrients, suppressing weed growth, and preventing soil erosion. And during the month of October, there is a ready source of organic mulch at hand. All of those leaves falling into your yard, crunched up and spread on garden beds or added to a [compost pile](#), will decompose and deliver a host of benefits that your landscape will reap in the spring.

Trim your 'Wasteline'



While many of us might want to lose a few pounds after the holidays, reducing our other 'wasteline' is also a worthy goal. The EPA estimates that the average American household increases its waste production by more than 25% during the holiday season. This translates to an extra 1 million tons of trash per week headed to landfills. One of the largest contributors to this trash increase is [packaging](#). Yes, recycling packaging whenever possible helps reduce the waste that winds up in landfills, but choosing to avoid packaging altogether is the better option. Shopping for gifts at local stores or craft fairs and purchasing food at farmers' markets provide opportunities to choose package free or minimally packaged items. Even some of the big online retailers offer sustainable packaging options since they don't have to rely on the packages to market their products. Not all gifts have to come from a store. Homemade goodies like decorated cookies and handmade gifts like a terrarium in a pretty upcycled container or a bird feeder filled with [seed and suet](#) show that you put time and thought into your gift choices. Gifts also don't have to be something wrapped up in paper and ribbon.

Experiences such as concert tickets, classes to learn a new skill, a membership that supports the arts, reservations for a weekend getaway, or a gift card from a favorite store or restaurant are a few package free options. With a little creativity and planning, you can enjoy the holiday season while still reducing the amount of waste that your family generates. And that is a gift in and of itself.

To report suspected water pollution in unincorporated Jefferson County, call 205.325.5792!

If you have questions or comments, or would like to schedule a presentation for your neighborhood or organization in unincorporated Jefferson County, please email diclementel@jccal.org or call 205.325.8741.