



Tiverton Wastewater District Grinder Pump Use and Abuse Policy

Effective Date

This policy is effective upon approval until another policy is enacted.

Approval

This policy has been approved by the Tiverton Wastewater District Board at their regular meeting on July 22, 2024.

Policy

Grinder pumps owned by the Tiverton Wastewater District (TWWD) are subject to normal wear and tear during use by customers of the TWWD. Costs for excessive service calls or excessive wear and tear due to abuse of any kind are not and should not be included in the sewer rates. Therefore, all costs associated with excessive services calls or repairs or replacement of grinder pumps due to improper use will be paid by the homeowner. This policy defines situations where the pump may have undergone undue wear and tear or has been the subject of an excessive number of service calls due to negligence of the homeowner and provides guidance on how customers will be held responsible for costs to repair or replace pumps in cases where negligence is clear.

Background

There are some grinder pumps within the TWWD service area that are owned by TWWD, and some are owned by property owners. When customers were connected to the TWWD system in the Riverside Drive area in 2023 as part of the Phase 1 expansion project, many of these customers were provided with grinder pumps that are owned by TWWD. Grinder pumps are important because they move wastewater for homes located far from, or below the main sewer line. Since wastewater cannot flow by gravity in this area, these pumps grind up the waste and push it up to the main sewer line. TWWD used grants from Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management via the Narragansett Bay & Watershed Restoration Fund and the US Environmental Protection Agency Non-Point Source Management Program, a loan from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank and a grant and loan from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to pay for the Phase 1 expansion project. According to the terms of the letter of conditions of the USDA loan, TWWD is responsible for the pumps for the 40-year term of the loan. The final payment on this loan is December 20th, 2061. Customers were given documentation titled: "Riverside Drive Area Grinder Pump Homeowner Responsibilities" (Responsibilities) available online at: https://www.twwd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Grinder-Pumps-Homeowner-Responsibilities_FINAL.pdf



TWWD Notification of property owners

Property owners are often unaware of the sanitary systems on their properties. Home inspectors may not be trained to recognize the presence of grinder pumps and may explicitly leave assessment of any sanitary equipment out of their inspections. The same is true of realtors, who usually know if the house is sewerer or on septic system but are unaware of the details of the sewer connection. To ensure that property owners are aware of their responsibilities, TWWD will notify new owners in cases where there is a grinder pump present, and provide them with our standard outreach materials, including this policy and the “Responsibilities” document mentioned above.

Homeowner actions

In the Responsibilities document referenced above, certain specific actions are prohibited, and if they are taken by the homeowner, they will be billed for any costs to repair, including pumping service, materials, and labor expenses. They are detailed below for clarity in the policy.

Some prohibited Items are listed below but are not limited to this list.

If reasonable evidence of any of the following items is found in a damaged pump the homeowner will be billed for costs to repair.

- Abrasive materials
- Antifreeze
- Aquarium stone
- Cigarette butts
- Chemicals
- Coffee grinds
- Cooking oil and Grease
- Cotton swabs
- Dental floss and dental picks
- Disposable diapers
- Explosives or Flammable materials
- Floor drains or sump pump discharges
- Gasoline, diesel fuels, kerosene
- Glass
- Gravel
- Kitty litter
- Lubricating oil
- Metal
- Nail polish remover, acetone
- Paints, varnishes, paint thinner or additives
- Plastic
- Plastic bags, pet waste bags
- Rope, string, fishing line
- Sand
- Sanitary napkins, tampons or applicators
- Seafood shells
- Socks, rags or cloths
- Storm water runoff or roof downspouts
- Strong chemicals (acids or alkaline)
- Wipes - personal, cleaning, cosmetic or baby wipes (even if labeled “flushable”)

Evidence suggests that undissolved powdered detergent can build-up inside the grinder pump. TWWD recommends against using such detergents and may require homeowners to pay repair costs if use of such detergents results in excessive service calls.

Some prohibited actions that may cause damage are listed below but are not limited to this list.

If reasonable evidence shows that any of the following actions have been taken that did cause additional damage to the pump, the homeowner will be billed for costs to repair or replacement.

- Tampering with the tank
- Attempting to repair the unit
- Tampering with the electrical service or control panel
- Burying the grinder pump lids.
- Building fences, decks or sheds over sewer mains or leads
- Planting trees or shrubs over the system, control panel, or discharge line
- Powering the pump with an improper source, for example a generator or other back-up power that does not meet the specifications of the pump.

Figure 2 Grinder pump installation.



Figure 1 Typical grinder pump installation at surface.





Excessive service calls.

If a customer contacts the maintenance contractor multiple times for problems with the operation of the pump resulting from the issues listed above it will be considered negligence by the homeowner. The threshold for excessive calls will be determined at the discretion of the TWWD Executive Director and staff. If it is determined that the calls are excessive, the customer will be charged accordingly for parts or labor due to repeated faults

Replacement of pump

Normal anticipated working life of the pump is 15-20 years. TWWD is responsible for the pumps until the end of the loan period on December 20th, 2061. Upon reaching the end of its useful life, the pump will be replaced by TWWD if that occurs prior to December 20th, 2061. On December 21, 2061, ownership of infrastructure that connects properties to the sewer main that is on private property will revert to the property owner and they will assume responsibility for repairs to that equipment.

Discretion of the Executive Director

Decisions on whether prohibited actions have contributed to pump failure are subject to judgement by the Executive Director in consultation with TWWD staff and contractors. In some cases, the Executive Director is granted discretion to negotiate charges temporarily until such time as the case can be heard by the Tiverton Wastewater District Board (the Board). The authority to adjust charges with customers rests with the Board in hardship cases. This temporary authority granted to the Executive Director is intended to prevent a customer from having to wait for a monthly meeting of the Board to be given a chance to request relief or negotiate payment options.

Policy approved by the Board of Directors on July 22, 2024

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