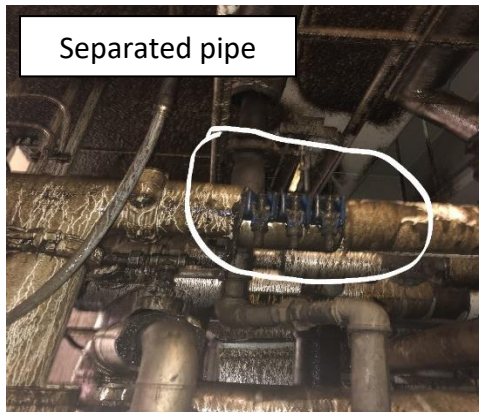


Date: 5/30/2019

Emergency Addressed – Disaster Averted

“Rag” Ball causes Digester Pipe Failure

Wildcat Hill Water Reclamation Plant [WHWRP] staff responded to an **emergency alarm at 1 am on Saturday, May 4**. On-call personnel found a pipe separated at the Digester stage of the plant. Digesters break down solids separated from the waste water through a biological process, creating potentially hazardous gases as a byproduct. In addition to releasing 30,000 gallons of partially-digested sludge, **deadly hydrogen sulfide gas was released into the hallways**. Staff continually use monitors to detect the presence of lethal gases, and in this case, the monitors alarmed a warning. Staff donned SCBA’s (portable air tanks) and began the initial repairs. A quick response was crucial, as the **methane gas also being released had the potential to cause an explosion**.



Twelve hours later, the last of the nasty sludge had been squeegeed from the tunnels, a replacement valve was retrieved from Phoenix and installed, and the disinfection process had begun. A potential disaster was averted.

The source of the problem? A “rag” ball jammed inside a pipe; the back pressure created by the blockage caused the piping to separate and leak.

How bad could it have been? As other utilities have discovered, it can result in an explosion destroying the facility, worker injury and even death. The cost to mitigate a disaster like this is hundreds of thousands of dollars, or more. And it’s **all created by habitual dumping of rags, “flushable” napkins, towels or feminine hygiene products down the drain**. These items can cause severe complications throughout the City sewer lines and at our wastewater treatment facilities.

Who pays for the remediation costs?
We do, through increased utility rates.

Is it preventable? Absolutely!
To find out more information about what should not go down our drains, [click here](#).



Digester explosion – Chicago Tribune, August 2018



Paul & Matt covered in sludge

We diverted a possible disaster at Wildcat Hill, largely through regular safety training and employing “best practices”. We’ll learn from this incident to train staff, increase frequency of valve inspections, and keep emergency spare parts on site.

The wastewater treatment staff’s response to this emergency speaks volumes about their dedication to the job on behalf of our community. Way to go, TEAM FLAGSTAFF!