

Save Our Sewers: Recycle Your Oil

December 24, 2008

AsianWeek



City's Asian restaurants powers MUNI fleets

SAN FRANCISCO — San Franciscans may still have to hold onto unwanted fruitcakes, but they can now recycle their used cooking oil during the holiday season.

SFGreasecycle — a program with The City's Public Utilities Commission (PUC) — will be collecting used cooking oils and fats for the purpose of developing eco-friendly biodiesel at locations throughout The City from Dec. 27 to 30. Launched in November 2007 by The City of San Francisco, the program has grown to include nearly 500 participating restaurants, with Asian restaurants accounting for nearly 40 percent of that number.

Supporters of the program are hoping that more residents and restaurants will join.

"A little bit of cooking oil down the drain may not seem like a lot, but it is when you multiply that by the 250,000 households in The City," said Supervisor Carmen Chu, who participated in a merchant walk on Dec. 22 on Irving Street to encourage local businesses and residents to participate in the program. "Why pour your cooking oil down the drain and pay for costly sewer cleanings when you can sustainably recycle it for biofuel?"

Similar to a clogged artery, when fats, oils and grease are flushed down the drain, it heavily impedes the flow of The City's sewer systems, creating clogs and unsanitary back-ups. The City spends approximately \$3.5 million in clearing the sewage system of the mess, and Chinatown has higher cases of blocked sewers than other neighborhoods.

"Because of the congestion of restaurants, traditionally there has been a significant problem with grease blockage in Chinatown," said Ving. "That's why it's so important for restaurants to learn more about our program and take advantage of this free program."

The program has made substantial progress in signing up Asian restaurants in the Sunset and Richmond Districts, but very few restaurants in Chinatown participate.

There were some early concerns about communicating with Asian restaurant owners and managers who were not fluent in English.

"Initially it was a concern, but so far it has been a non-issue," said Ving. "When we're in the kitchen, we can get by with gestures and hand signs. It's much more difficult when restaurant owners call me about the program."

Asian restaurants typically utilize cooking oil significantly more than other cuisines and, according to Ving, SFGreasecycle tends to collect more used oil from those restaurants compared to others in The City. The city-run program saves both restaurants and taxpayers money with fewer repairs to drain pipes and city sewers.

However, the restaurants aren't the only ones benefiting. The used cooking oil collected by The City is used to develop biodiesel, which has been fueling the entire MUNI fleet, fire engines and other diesel-operated vehicles in The City. Overall, biodiesel emits fewer pollutants in the air, is biodegradable and is comparable in price to petroleum-based diesel fuel.

The PUC is hoping to get more Chinatown restaurants on board for the Greasecycle program next year.

"We're hoping to reach out to merchants and small restaurants at the upcoming Chinese New Year's festival," said PUC's biofuel coordinator Karri Ving, who added that the program will set up a booth to encourage residents to bring used cooking oil to the festival and trade it for gifts such as kitchen oil strainers.

Used Cooking Oil Drop-off Event Dec. 27-30

Costco Warehouse (*Parking Lot*)
450 10th St. (*and Bryant*)

Hours:

Saturday: 9:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

Sunday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Monday & Tuesday: 10 a.m.–8:30 p.m.

S.F. Whole Foods Markets

(Parking Areas)

· **Franklin:** 1765 California St. (and Franklin)

· **Potrero Hill:** 450 Rhode Island St. (and Mariposa)

· **SoMa:** 399 4th St. (and Harrison)

Hours: Saturday–Tuesday, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.

Here are some easy tips to collect and recycle your oil:

1. Cool down used cooking oil in the pan.
2. Pour used oil into a clean, non-breakable, leak-proof container with a tight lid. Consider using old containers, such as mayonnaise jars or the original container.
3. Make sure oil is free of water, soapsuds and food scraps.
4. Drop-off your leak-proof container at Costco or any Whole Foods Market in San Francisco during store hours Saturday through Tuesday after Christmas.

sfgreasecycle.org

<http://www.asianweek.com/2008/12/24/save-our-sewers-recycle-your-oil-city%E2%80%99s-asian-restaurants-powers-muni-fleets/>