

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

The following frequently asked questions are provided to assist Jackson County Utility customers in understanding the concept of Gravity Sewer Systems as well as Low- Pressure Sewer Systems and the requirements for using either a Gravity or Low-Pressure sewer connection. *Prior to initiating service, a customer must complete the Residential Pressure Sewer Connection Application.* Any billing, service or technical questions should be directed to Jackson County Utilities Customer Service at (850) 482-9633.

### **What is a Conventional Gravity Sewer System?**

Conventional wastewater collection systems transport sewage from homes or other sources by gravity flow through buried piping systems to a central treatment facility. These systems are usually reliable and consume no power. A constant downhill slope must be guaranteed along the length of the sewer to maintain self-cleansing flows, which can require deep excavations. Access manholes are placed at set intervals above the sewer, at pipe intersections and at changes in pipeline direction (vertically and horizontally) to allow for inspection, maintenance, and system upgrades.

### **What if a Gravity Connection is not possible?**

Certain areas exhibit conditions that are not favorable for the installation and operation of conventional gravity sewer collection systems. In order to provide these areas with sewer service, an alternative wastewater collection technology is necessary. A low-pressure sewer system is an acceptable alternative technology. In general, gravity sewers are preferable to pressure sewers. However, costs and conditions can make gravity sewers not possible which is the case for some residences located in the Indian Springs Phase 2A Sewer Extension. In these cases, houses are located below the roadway/public right-of-way thus prohibiting the use of a gravity sewer connection.

### **What is a Low-Pressure Sewer System?**

Low Pressure Sewer Systems consist of small diameter pipes which individual, private grinder or effluent type pump stations pump into. Connecting to a pressure sewer requires a wet well (or holding tank) and a pump, collectively known as a "pump station". Grinder pump stations consist of a prefabricated wet well, which is buried in the ground and collects the sewage and houses the pump, electrical service and a control panel. Each residence would need a small grinder pump station to collect wastewater from the home, grind it up, and then pump it into the pressure sewer line.

All pump stations require a dedicated 35-amp, 230-volt electrical service. An alarm light and audible alarm are usually mounted on the wall of the house; the light flashes and horn sounds if the pump(s) fail to operate. A small pressure pipe would be needed to connect the grinder pump station to the sewer collection piping within the roadway. All electrical installation will be done by a licensed electrician.

### **How do I size my Private Pump station?**

There is no need to size your pump station. The services of a professional engineer were obtained by the County to appropriately size the on-site pump station and service line.

## **What is the Customer's Ownership Responsibility?**

Jackson County Utilities operates and maintains most common sewer pipes within public rights of ways and wastewater utility easements dedicated to the County into which an individual residence service line discharges. As part of the *Residential Sewer Installation and Maintenance Agreement*, the Owner grants the County access to the property for the purpose of providing services including but not limited to inspections, maintenance, and repairs. Therefore, the only responsibility of the Owner is to follow the instructions as explained in the *Important Information for Grinder Pump Owners* included with the *Residential Customer Application for Sewer Systems*.

## **What is required to connect my house to the new sewer system?**

As an *Early Initiative Sewer Connection Program*, the construction and installation of all components of the individual pump station and connecting the sewer service pipe up to the County's sewer main pipe shall be paid for by Jackson County Utilities. The Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD) is grant funding the project for the County. All on-site improvements, including the gravity service line or, if necessary, associated grinder station and service line, electrical and abandonment of septic tank will be constructed in accordance with local, state and federal building codes. Individual connections to the common sewer pipe will be made through the Jackson County Utilities Department via qualified construction contractors.

Connections made after the *Early Initiative Sewer Connection Program* deadline, (which is TBD but will be 1 year after completion of construction of the sewer collection system), will be subject to the following:

Connection of individual residential systems will be provided upon applying for service and payment of appropriate fees and charges to the Jackson County Utilities Department. These fees include, but are not limited to, sewer impact fee and connection fees. The impact fee assessed to the Owner is for the permitting, construction and installation cost of all components of the individual pump station, connecting the pump station pipe to the main line pipe within the existing road right-of-way, and abandonment of existing septic tank.

Typically, a customer will contact Jackson County Utilities to get a quote for the fees required to initiate the work to construct the new system and connect the house to the central sewer collection system. The County will include the cost to install either the gravity sewer service or grinder station, the pressure service line from the station to the connection point at the property line and to abandon (obtain permit, pump out and fill with dirt) the existing septic tank.

## **How is my sewer charge calculated? How much will my bill be?**

Sewer only customers are charged based on the metered customers' average water bill for the previous month. The City of Marianna is the owner of the wastewater treatment facility and therefore, their (the City's) metered customers will dictate the average bill for the previous month. Depending on the average amount calculated by the previous month, your sewer bill could range from \$30-\$50/month. Once connected to water you will be billed based on actual water usage.

## **What is the cost for a homeowner to connect to the gravity or low pressure system?**

If the *Residential Customer Application for Sewer Systems* is completed and submitted on or before the *Early Initiative Sewer Connection Program* deadline there will be **NO** out of pocket cost to the Owner except for the \$125 security deposit which is refundable after one year if there are no late payments within the first year.

## **What is the cost for a homeowner to connect to the gravity or low pressure system after the *Early Initiative Sewer Connection Program* deadline?**

For those owners that decide to prolong the connection and apply after the deadline, out of pocket costs will be required. This is due to the grant funds no longer being available to the County. The grant agreement with the NFWFMD requires for the funds to be returned to the NFWFMD 1-year after construction of the sewer piping is complete. Therefore, the County will no longer have funds available for property owners to construct the service lines, service connections, and abandon existing septic systems. Once the Early Initiative deadline has passed, property owners will be required to pay the deposit of \$125, a \$500 impact fee and a \$5,727 gravity connection fee or \$16,110 grinder pump station fee (includes on-site installation costs, plumbing work, and septic tank abandonment) for a total fee of \$6,352 and \$16,735, respectively. This fee is based on today's costs and subject to increase based on costs at the time of sewer connection.

## **What will happen to my pump during power outages?**

One basic concern with pressure sewers in our area is the fact that pumps will not work in power outages that may be experienced during and after a hurricane. The proposed grinder pump stations will have limited excess holding capacity to provide wastewater storage for approximately 1 day during most electrical power outages. Precautionary measures should be taken during these unforeseen power outages to reduce water usage. Also, keep in mind that when power outages are experienced, the average consumption of water significantly decreases. As with any electrically powered device, the pump could be powered by an emergency generator if necessary. Every power panel for each pump will have a receptacle for connection to a generator. A 5kw generator with the correct plug will run your grinder station.

## **How much power will the pump use?**

Monthly power consumption of a grinder pump station is substantially less than that of most other major appliances. This is comparable to the cost associated with the operation of a 100-watt light bulb or small refrigerator. The pump usage is typically in the range of 30 to 60 minutes per month. Typical yearly electrical costs may range from \$20.00 to \$30.00.

## **How will I know if there is a problem with my pump and who should I call?**

All pumps will be equipped with an audio and visual alarm. The alarm is part of a small panel, which is typically located on the side of the home in a place visible from the street.

The Jackson County Utility Department should be contacted immediately if the alarm is activated. The County will have staff or a representative available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to evaluate, diagnose and repair the system as needed in an expedited time frame.

**What type of power will be required for the installation of the pump?**

The pump stations require a dedicated 35-amp, 230-volt electrical service. The pump installation contractor will determine if your power supply is adequate and make the necessary adjustment for powering your grinder station.

**Do I have to connect to the sewer system?**

Everyone is encouraged to sign-up/connect immediately. For those who chose not to connect immediately, per Florida Statutes/County Ordinance, they have 1 year after written notification that the system is available for connection.

# IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR GRINDER PUMP OWNERS

## PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS

You have a sewer system known as a low-pressure force main with a grinder pump. This is a very reliable system as long as a few simple precautions are taken.

Wastewater from your house empties into a tank buried in the ground. There is a pump inside the tank that grinds human wastes and pumps it under pressure to the street into a larger pipe that takes it to the wastewater treatment plant.

There are certain objects that cannot be flushed through the system and more importantly through the grinder pump. Those objects are **GREASE**, cooking oil of any kind, glass, metal including razor blades and needles, plastics such as toys and utensils, sanitary napkins or tampons, seafood shells, fish scales, diapers, rags, hair, or clothing of any kind. In addition, you must NEVER introduce explosives, flammable material, oil, strong chemicals to include household chemicals or gasoline. Do not use any clog removing liquids such as Liquid Plumber or Drain-o. Should these products be needed, use a minimal amount.

**Do not flush** heads or wipes from a **toilet cleaning wand**. In addition, do not flush wipes or towelettes of any kind including baby wipes, cleaning cloths, medicated cloths, sanitizing napkins or Q-tips.

Any of these materials may cause the pump to fail and it may not be covered under warranty. If the grinder pump fails due to misuse or abuse, then the owner/occupant will be liable for any damages including the cost of materials, labor and equipment caused by his negligence. Grease is the biggest culprit because it is so easy to pour a little down the drain and think nothing of it. Grease sticks to the float switches, hardens and does not allow the pump to cycle. You can guess what happens then.

During temporary power outages, be aware that your pump will not operate. There should be enough reserve in the tank for adequate toilet flushing but you should refrain from other water needs until power is restored.

Appropriate materials to allow down the drain or flushed in the toilet include toilet paper, liquid or foam soap, household cleaners and human waste.

Jackson County Utilities will clean and service the lift station annually. All additional cleaning for removing grease buildup and other foreign objects from the lift station due to negligence or misuse by owner/occupant will be charged to the owner/occupant. In the event of such grease buildup, Jackson County Utilities agrees to remove same, there will be a separate additional charge for such service, billed on the next statement of the account holder.

If you have any questions concerning the operation and maintenance of your grinder pump, please give Jackson County Utilities a call at (850) 482-9633.