

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

For consideration at the Standing Committee meeting of City Council on July 9, 2025

1. **A Drain on Resources and Resources Down the Drain: Pulling the plug on In-Sink Garbage Disposal**

Submitted by: Councillor Fry

WHEREAS

1. First invented a hundred years ago, the in-sink food disposal unit (also known as in-sink garbage disposal unit or garburator) is an electrically powered mechanical macerator or grinder, designed to shred food waste into pieces small enough to pass through plumbing. The process effectively diverts food waste from composting or landfill to be processed via wastewater treatment plants.
2. Garburators add a significant load of organic solids and nutrients to wastewater systems, increasing the strain on treatment facilities and potentially causing clogs and higher water usage, in contrast to normal household drainage of blackwater and greywater, which, while still requiring robust treatment, generally poses less strain in terms of solids and nutrient loads compared to garburator waste.
3. Specific impacts of in sink food disposal on wastewater treatment systems include:
 - a. **Increased Solid Load:** Food waste from garbage disposals adds to the solid matter in wastewater, requiring more effort to remove before treatment can begin. Solids must be physically separated and disposed of, adding to operational costs.
 - b. **Higher Nutrient Loads:** The organic matter from food waste contributes to higher nutrient loads, such as nitrogen and phosphorus. These nutrients can lead to issues like oxygen depletion in water bodies, affecting aquatic life
 - c. **Operational Strain:** The additional solid load can settle in treatment basins, clog pumps, and damage equipment, leading to increased maintenance and replacement costs.
 - d. **Contaminants:** If not carefully screened, in sink garbage disposal can introduce contaminants like PFAS (forever chemicals) and microplastics into the wastewater stream, which can be recirculated in the treated water or separated bio-sludge .
 - e. **Methane Generation:** Organic material and food waste can also decompose in sewer systems before reaching treatment plants, releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.
 - f. **Clogged Pipes:** Food waste can also create significant problems in the sanitary sewer pipe network. Notably, fats, oils, and grease (FOG) congeal and solidify into “fatbergs” that can result in clogs, sewage backups, and overflows necessitating expensive remediation. Every year Metro Vancouver

spends more than \$2.7 million fixing grease damage in the sewer system.¹

4. Food Waste isn't Garbage. Composting food waste is a better approach than diverting it to wastewater treatment, primarily because composting offers a valuable resource at a lower cost. Composting is more environmentally friendly, resource-efficient and regulatorily compliant. In Metro Vancouver, food scraps have been banned from solid waste disposal since January 2015.
5. Stricter modern water quality standards are requiring increasingly costly water treatment technologies. Liquid waste in Vancouver is processed at the 1963-commissioned Iona Island Wastewater Treatment Plant and is scheduled to be upgraded from primary to tertiary treatment at a cost of \$10 billion (2025).²
6. Source separation, diverting organic solids from grey and black water is largely seen as a cost-effective measure to mitigate the cost of wastewater treatment. As a result many municipalities have banned garburators, including Toronto (2002), Victoria (2002 – industrial use), Ottawa (2003), Kingston (2008), Barrie (2012), Squamish (2016).³ The City of Vancouver currently has a food waste diversion plan in Solid Waste By-law No. 8417⁴ that prohibits the unlawful disposal of food waste. The City's Sewer and Watercourse By-law No. 8093⁵ regulates the quantity and quality of discharged wastes into the sewerage system

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to amplify Metro Vancouver messaging and remind residents via the City's own Waste Disposal and Recycling webpage, printed pickup schedules, and information channels to publicly communicate the cost, infrastructure and environmental impacts of in-sink disposal, and encourage residents' use of composting and green bin organic waste diversion.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to report back with proposed amendments to the Building By-law to prohibit in sink disposal units in new construction in the City Vancouver;

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to report back with proposed amendments to the Solid Waste By-law and Sewer and Watercourse By-law to properly divert

¹ CBC | Metro Vancouver removes 50 tonnes of 'fatbergs' from Richmond, B.C., sewers
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/fatbergs-richmond-sewer-1.7363936>

² Metro Vancouver | Iona Island Wastewater Treatment Plant Projects
<https://metrovancouver.org/services/liquid-waste/iona-island-wastewater-treatment-plant-projects>

³ City of Vancouver FOI Proactive Release | Most recent records regarding the usage of garburators
<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2020-282-release.pdf>

⁴ City of Vancouver | Amendment to Solid Waste By-law No 8417 regarding organic waste
<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/bylaw-11092.PDF>

⁵ City of Vancouver | Sewer and Watercourse By-law No. 8093
<https://bylaws.vancouver.ca/8093c.PDF>

food scraps from liquid waste disposal.

- C. THAT Council requests that the Mayor write a letter to the Chair and Board of Metro Vancouver advising concerns over the impacts of in-sink disposal units on wastewater treatment plant costs and urging a regional approach to curtail the use of in-sink disposal units, and ban food scrap from liquid waste disposal.

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