

Industry roundtable



Working together to help operators see through the FOG

Experts from across the industry spectrum came together for a special FEJ roundtable discussion, in association with Mechline, on current legislation for grease management, common mistakes that operators make, and ways the supply chain can work together to improve FOG management

How robust is the legislation for FOG management in kitchens today?

David Morgan: The legislation is quite strong under the Water Industry Act 1991 section 111. There's different perspectives from different water companies and not necessarily a consistent approach of how that is interpreted and actioned upon. From our perspective at Southern Water, we are much more reluctant than perhaps others are to prosecute, but we'll look towards cost recovery as a way of enforcement. But the actual prosecution, because it's a criminal offence, you have to prove it beyond reasonable doubt. So if you've got a blockage and there's a considerable amount of FSEs in the same place, you've got to pinpoint it down to one. You can't just do a carpet prosecution against everyone. It's a tricky subject. And from a public perception, I don't think Southern Water seem to prosecute people necessarily for this sort of



John Newell, Mechline

ON THE PANEL

- **Richard Jeffryes**, National Contracts Manager, Catercall
- **Joe Rushton**, Operations Manager, Catercall
- **Alex Dudfield**, Network Protection Team - Engagement Lead, Thames Water
- **Gareth Sefton**, Managing Director, SHW Design
- **David Morgan**, Network Enforcement and Protection Officer, Southern Water
- **John Newell**, Commercial Director, Mechline
- **Nick Falco**, Product & Technical Director, Mechline

thing. We would much rather try and engage and educate, and try to encourage people to use what's there at the moment. We would look at cost recovery because obviously it's costing us money, but the prosecution of a criminal offence, you are unlikely to see with us at Southern Water.

So the legislative framework is there, but education is the preferred way of enforcement?

David Morgan: Yes, absolutely. Our enforcement process at the end, including cost recovery, is really a last resort. [We would] much rather go through all the phases before that. Most of the time, we do get compliance. But again, compliance as in grease management installations can be a little bit hit and miss. They do engage with us, but with smaller FSEs, particularly, the cost issues mean that they just see it as something they can do without. The only thing we would welcome is for there to be mandatory legislation for grease management in place. I know that a lot of pressure has been put on Defra and Ofwat, but it does not look like anything is happening any time soon.

Alex Dudfield: From a Thames Water perspective, I think we would mostly agree. As you would probably expect, we don't want to go out and prosecute people. We will if we have to, but I absolutely agree it is about education first. With most people, it's not malicious - it is simply that they didn't know they had to have it in the first place. So education, most of the time, works. On the legislative front, I think things are strict enough for what we need to do, but it isn't necessarily easy for the end-user to understand. And they are almost two different goals. If we really wanted to go out and prosecute someone then, strictly speaking, we could just walk into somewhere and say, 'you don't have grease management', and we only have to prove three things really: that you're a FOG producing business, which all restaurants are, you're connected to our sewers, which is very easy to check, and you have no means of stopping FOG getting in the sewer.

Richard Jeffryes: I'm not 100% certain prosecution is the initial catalyst to get things happening. I would say a simple



Joe Rushton and Richard Jeffries, Catercall

statutory fine for non-compliance. Non-compliance is something that is really simple to prove. So under Building Regulations Part H, there is a statement - if your business serves hot food, by law you need to have a grease separator installed. That's quite simple. It's quite straightforward, right? And it's easy to prove. Surely, you don't have to go to the extent of prosecuting somebody. You walk in and if there's nothing installed, there's your fine, and install it within three months. Surely that would be the way to do it.

Alex Dudfield: We think, and our legal team seem to think, that if somewhere, simply put, doesn't meet those three things - you don't have grease management. Then even if they've not caused a problem, if we wanted to, that's enough to go down the prosecution route. I think we're probably a bit of an outlier in the water industry, in that we have that opinion. We haven't gone through one that's done that, yet, but we've had a bit of

an expansion recently, and a tightening up of our processes. And if one does come through that way, our process is built that eventually - after plenty of education - it will go that way. I think a test trial in that case is going to be very interesting, because that would effectively lay out on the line that if you haven't caused a problem, is that still itself an offence? We think it is. I think most people would agree. And if we get to that point, where we have a test case that we could point

towards, that would probably make everything a lot easier than trying to convince Defra to create some new legislation or new standards.

Richard Jeffries: We service a lot of kitchens and see a lot of irresponsible people out there. They might not see the benefit [of FOG management] but they are being irresponsible, and the whole world is in the same boat. We are all wanting the benefits of sustainability without the cost of sustainability. Why should a handful of responsible businesses pick that up?

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Is it a case that operators pleading naivety when it comes to FOG, or are they just saying they don't know where to go or what to do about it?

Alex Dudfield: I think once we get into a site - and I assume it's similar with yourself - and actually have that conversation, there are definitely going to be people that tell you to go away. That's always going to be the case, but the vast majority are on board, and willing to do something. Is it to the standard we want? Not always, but it is a step forward. The difficulty, at least we find, is getting that message out to so many sole traders. With big brands, it's really easy to talk to the head office and suddenly 500 businesses are engaging with you. People that are probably going to read this magazine, generally speaking, they're the people that are going to be more engaged than maybe a local fish and chip shop which for 30 years has been run in the same way. It has also been made more difficult by the fact that hospitality has gone through so many challenges over the past five years. Trying to get that message out to so many sole traders - in our region there are at least 60,000 on our books that we are aware of - is not easy. And there are probably an equal number that we are not aware of! How do you reach out to people that are not engaged in anything that is beyond their own business, effectively? It is very difficult. But the messaging when we get



Alex Dudfield, Thames Water



Gareth Sefton, SHW Design

out there tends to be good. We typically go from maybe 10% of people having something installed when we carry out the very first visit to about 60% once we've gone through some form of engagement, so it does work. But the problem is that remaining 40% - how do you work with them? And with those, if we've tried the carrot approach, then it might be more of a stick approach. There are also a lot of businesses we haven't visited yet. We have got quite a big team. There are 28 of us. We have visited around 20,000 businesses in about eight years. But that's not sustainable when you are thinking about 100,000 businesses. That's 35 years to get around to everyone once, by which point most of those businesses have closed and moved on! So we think a lot about how to get that message out on mass in a way that is going to be convincing - because ultimately we need food businesses to think, 'that was really good, I really should spend £3,000 on this piece of equipment'.

Gareth Sefton: This is a hygiene issue, right? Could there be a way of linking this through the local authority to the five-star hygiene rating? Because a lot of operators really care about that. If they lose a star, they start getting a bit sweaty. So if the grease management element forms part of that hygiene inspection, like it is with the hot water getting to the tap in a certain timeframe, etc, then that will make the most sense, because they don't want a three-star review on their premises. That message would reach out to every single one, so that's one way of addressing it. The other thing that I struggle with



Nick Falco, Mechline



is related to the legislation - that side of it is clear but what isn't very clear is how effective the products that are on the market are. And there doesn't seem to be any management of how good those products are. As far as we can see, we get thrown leaflets with lots of boxes with the drain that goes in, the drain goes out, and a statement that says, 'This is magic, no grease goes past it'.

Richard Jeffryes: Well, it's subjective, because if they are not maintained, it's only a box when it goes in.

Gareth Sefton: I'm not even convinced half of them work anyway, and how many times do we see dosing units and when you open them up there's nothing in them. They're not managed. I think there's a whole grey area there about what enzyme dosing does.

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Nick Falco: Probably the biggest issue we get is people not understanding they need something in the first place. That's where the educational bit is important. There's independent data out there that suggests that 90% of foodservice establishments don't have any grease management of any kind.

John Newell: I think it depends how you cut your 90%, because if you look at a kitchen there are grease-producing areas that don't even get talked about. We don't even worry about them. So there are certain things, whether it is a multifunctional cooking device, whether it is a bratt pan, these things are causing fat, oil and grease to go into the system. Many people mention things like grease separation - that becomes an even bigger challenge. So, how do you look after those parts of your kitchen?



Alex Dudfield, David Morgan and John Newell

Nick Falco: That's why there's this big confusion between enzyme dosing and biological bacteria. They are two very different things. Enzyme, you could argue whether it has its place or not. Obviously I would say that because we manufacture a biological dosing product. But we test and we test, and we have even tested, in fact, with Southern Water. It is all about education. You can get enzyme dosing, and there is a place for that. But biological bacteria is something very different, and it's getting that point across to people who are keen to understand the difference between the two, and what one does against the other.

From an educational perspective, what does good grease management actually look like?

John Newell: I think the important thing is [to] understand your operation. Where are the areas where grease management is absolutely needed? And prioritise those. Make sure that you've got some sort of maintenance plan in place and you're

thinking that through, so that you understand your business and you've selected the right kind of equipment to cover all of your problem areas. When I talk to an end-user, they are the three things that you need to budget for and you need to think about, and start there. The other thing is also engaging staff and making sure that staff understand the implications of what happens when things go wrong.

Joe Rushton: From our side, on the dealer end away from manufacturers, we are actually starting to push that sustainability narrative when it comes to grease management and trying to be a little bit ahead of the curve on that. I think what I would suggest, and hopefully our competitors within the market are saying the same thing, is that it all starts with staff education. Take time to understand what products companies such as Mechline and others have, and understand what different establishments are going to need in terms of an equipment solution. Education - not only for the end-user - but for dealers as well, would be a massive plus.