

Best Practice

BEWARE THE GREASE BEAST (drain pollution prevention problem)

CONTACT

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Project Date: Ongoing

THE PRACTICE

In early 2018, the City of Lloydminster's Wastewater Treatment team and the Communications team came together to discuss how the City might raise awareness around household drain pollution, leading to a reduction in harmful materials being flushed down household drains and toilets.

The City of Lloydminster was preparing to fund and build a new \$80-million wastewater treatment plant and a reduction in potentially damaging materials entering the system would help protect this critical (and costly) piece of infrastructure.

In July 2018, the City of Lloydminster introduced to 'Grease Beast,' a nine-foot-tall, representation of the harmful substances and materials that are too often flushed down City drains and toilets.

Packaged as a 'guerilla-style' communications campaign, the Grease Beast moves throughout the community, raising resident awareness of the hazards, costs and complications resulting from drain pollution. This campaign also provides key information about precautionary measures residents can all take to avoid 'feeding the Grease Beast,' which are demonstrated through a number of child-friendly learning demonstrations, games and activities.

Moving forward, the City of Lloydminster Communications team plans to work with local school divisions to develop a classroom component for the Grease Beast campaign, ensuring local youth are doing their part to 'battle the Beast.'

More information at <https://www.lloydminster.ca/greasebeast>

THE PROCESS

Given the unique, edgy nature of the proposed campaign, Communications had to ensure Council was properly briefed prior to the roll-out. Mayor and Council embraced the campaign, doing their part to advocate the campaign during regular community-engagement activities. The Mayor also wrote an article in the local newspaper, which helped boost awareness and community buy-in.

The Communications team and the Wastewater Treatment team worked closely during the development and execution of the campaign. By working together to understand and address the challenges, the teams were

successful in creating a highly educational and impactful movement that became 'locally viral' on regional social media pages.

A strategy for cost-effective construction of the Grease Beast was one of the first hurdles. The Communications team engaged with members of the Lloydminster Collective Art Market, who agreed to partner on the project for little more than the cost of supplies. The City's Wastewater Treatment staff met with the group of artists to provide context of the 'most infamous items that had ever been flushed.' Within a two-month period, the Collective Art Market team produced the Grease Beast, as he appears today.

City of Lloydminster Shop staff and Roadway Services staff were instrumental in the early stages of the project. The Shop staff allocated welding resources to fabricate the Beast's heavy steel frame, while Roadway Services worked to move the Beast around the City during the spring, summer and fall months. An incredible amount of collaboration and teamwork was – and continues to be – required to make this project successful.

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Both teams understood ads, posters and other traditional means would not be enough. The campaign needed to have 'shock factor' to significantly change behaviours.

THE RESULTS

At first, the Grease Beast was introduced under an intentional air of mystery; it was only about 10 days after his first public appearance that we began explaining his intent via social media. The immediate public reaction surpassed all expectations, taking on an organic life of its own. Local families began touring around the City looking for the Grease Beast, sharing photos and videos on social media. At one point, there was even a 'Where is the Grease Beast?' Facebook page, where residents shared information about the Grease Beast's current location and his meaning.

The project is ongoing. Though it will be difficult to accurately measure a reduction in harmful materials entering the wastewater system, it can be reasonably assumed that the sustained and widespread community awareness will result in an improved wastewater quality.

At the beginning, the greatest challenge was coordinating among all the involved departments to ensure our already busy municipal teams could allocate time and resources. We overcame this through one-on-one meetings with department managers to explain the intent, provide campaign schedules and clearly present our need for support, which eventually lead to each department taking a sense of ownership within the project. The accolades and praise received for this project are shared and celebrated among all involved departments.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the takeaways we've gleaned from this project is that sometimes it pays to be bold in engaging the community in new and unique ways – but with strategic purpose. We spent a great deal of time discussing the common human behaviours we were seeking to change, then worked together to problem solve. Though a great plan was in place at the start, we quickly adapted our approach to align with the unanticipated level of social media momentum.

Engaging third-party community organizations (ie: the Collective Art Market) helps to generate organic community excitement and looking back, we could have done more to involve local youth / non-profit organizations at the outset.