

Hydrogen Sulfide — Restaurants' Invisible Curse

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RESTAURANT MANAGER

While the smell of fettuccine and ravioli filled the inside of a busy national chain restaurant in Florida, the aroma outside its doors was nowhere near as enticing.

Though the Italian restaurant had followed city regulations and installed concrete grease interceptors, an unpleasant odor was escaping through nearby manways that was so strong, neighbors complained.

Hazardous Hydrogen Sulfide (H₂S)

The restaurant was having an H₂S odor problem — hydrogen sulfide, a gas that creates a pungent, rotten-egg smell. Depending on the time of exposure and the concentration, H₂S can irritate the eyes, nose and throat or trigger more serious ailments such as headaches, vomiting, and difficulty breathing. Prolonged exposure to high doses can even cause death.

Hardly the effect a restaurant wants to have on those who live nearby, it was especially frustrating to the restaurant’s manager. “Our goal is not only to have a good, clean, safe restaurant both for our employees and our guests, we also want to be a good neighbor...these odors are repulsive,” she said.



Concrete condemned to corrode

Hydrogen sulfide develops from bacteria that thrive inside a grease interceptor. Concrete's porous surface allows grease to become embedded inside the container's walls. Once grease penetrates the walls, they can never be properly cleaned. Bacteria then multiplies within this layer, causing odor and eventually leads to the corrosion of the concrete.

Determined to eliminate this problem, the restaurant's owners spent both time and money on studies and inspections. "We did everything over and above the (county's) recommendations to resolve this issue," said the manager. "We did everything we could. We regularly had our grease traps pumped; we were jetting out lines and putting bacteria treatment in out lines."

But the odor persisted, as did the neighbors' complaints. Residents often knocked on the restaurant's back door wanting to know if staff were aware of the odor. "In the three years I've been here, this was something I dealt with on a monthly basis," she said.

At one point, county inspectors intervened and suggested a lift station be installed — a move that would have been a huge expense. But the restaurant's owners were prepared to do this, if it was the only answer.

Instead of something as disruptive as a lift station, it was determined that a better solution was needed. The restaurant worked with Zurn Green Turtle to have two Proceptor GMC-1250 engineered fiberglass grease interceptors installed. (The restaurant's parent company had successfully used Proceptors to solve other effluent problems at restaurants across Florida.)

Back to business

Immediately after the Proceptors were installed, the odor problem disappeared and has not returned, to the manager's delight. "All of a sudden it hit me, nobody's been knocking on my back door," she said. "Honestly, since I've done that, I've never heard from the neighbors." Now the only smells that greet patrons and neighbors are the appetizing aromas of marinara sauce and garlic bread.

The Proceptor's smooth fiberglass interior has proven to be easy to clean, preventing grease and bacteria build-up. And with a 30-year warranty against corrosion and structural failure, the restaurant can focus on its cuisine.

"This problem has totally gone away. I haven't given it a second thought since Proceptor went in," said the manager.

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