

Category: **Corporate and Business Communications Campaign**

Entrant: **Southern Water**

Entry: **Relieving the Pain in the Drain**

CAMPAIGN BRIEF

The problem of sewer blockages caused by fat, oil and grease (FOG) is not new. For decades customers have poured FOG down the plughole, clogging the arteries of the sewer network, furring them into grimy submission. This creates the risk of sewage overflowing into homes, flooding streets and causing environmental damage.

Traditional solutions have depended on sewer-jetting programmes running in tandem with public relations campaigns aimed at educating customers about the need not to discard fat, oil and grease down the sink, loo or drain.

Three years ago we launched a creative campaign aimed at raising FOG in the public eye. Headline-catching initiatives included giving 180 packets of lard to a renowned potter, commissioning him to sculpt Lardy the Fatman from this unusual material – a UK ‘first’. Also, persuading celebrities such as pop star Suggs from Madness to go down the Brighton sewers for free to tell the public that “It’s madness to pour fat, oil and grease down the sink”.

Two years ago we freshened the campaign with a number of further ‘firsts’ which included sending a renowned street artist to busy shopping centres in FOG hotspot cities where startled shoppers were stopped in their tracks when confronted with huge 3D visions of FOG-blocked sewers.

During the past year the brief was to again identify an unconventional campaign to build awareness of the problem of fat, oil and grease blocking the sewers and encourage the public to ‘Bag It and Bin It’.

OBJECTIVE

The objective was to implement a ‘more than business as usual’ FOG campaign to raise awareness and reduce the number of sewer blockages.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

We had to think differently to identify a new, creative way of solving the FOG problem. Our idea was to launch a scheme which helps reduce sewer blockages while providing rehabilitation and employment for prisoners.

Moreover, this new scheme would be the most positive yet of all the company’s award-winning FOG initiatives because it recycles FOG into products which benefit the planet.

To achieve this we worked in partnership with the charity Work This Way whose goal is to help offenders find jobs. When developing strategy and tactics for this innovative campaign to collect and recycle cooking fats from customers’ homes, we decided to work with prisoners for a very good reason. Prisons are officially the second biggest producers of used cooking oil in the UK, second only to the Ministry of Defence. Indeed, this is the first prisoner oil-recycling scheme in the UK.

Our strategy was to partner Work This Way so that we could promote the initiative and expand it from purely prisons into domestic collections. This is key to greater success because a recent study by the University of Brighton estimates that each household produces 3kg of used cooking oil – much of which is poured down the plughole. That’s no longer the case in our targeted town of East Preston where prisoners make bi-weekly kerbside collections of cooking oil.

Essentially, offenders from Ford Open Prison in West Sussex collect used oil from nearby East Preston homes and from the prison itself and convert it into biofuel for vehicles.

Strategy and tactics included launching a PR campaign to encourage households to take part in doorstep collections.

IMPLEMENTATION INCLUDING WHERE, WHEN AND FOR HOW LONG

East Preston was identified as the trial town after inspecting data of FOG hotspot areas across Kent and Sussex. This small West Sussex coastal town has a population of 5,500, its own cinema and a thriving summer festival. It also suffered from a staggering 119 sewer blockages caused by fat, oil and grease last year. That’s nearly two blockages every week. In its vicinity lies Ford Open Prison – and prisons are huge polluters of sewers. It provided the perfect location for a year long ‘Fight the FOG’ campaign.

RESEARCH, PLANNING, MEASUREMENT

Having measured the number of sewer blockages before the campaign began, our plan was to trial the FOG-fighting prison initiative in East Preston with full PR support and then measure the results by again recording the number of sewer blockages at the end of the campaign. If successful, this project would move to other towns with serious FOG problems near prisons.

OUTPUTS

To promote the scheme in East Preston we:

- Staged a media launch with local businesses and stakeholders, including Arun District Council to help publicise the recycling scheme.
- Hand-delivered Fat Traps (small containers for collecting fat, oil and grease from frying pans and the like) to every home.
- Wrote, designed and produced brochures encouraging the recycling of cooking fat.
- Dropped leaflets through letterboxes
- Produced a block-busting film promoting FOG messages via a Christmas song sung by Southern Water's sewer engineers, placing it on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fef0ZPB Ecc
- Convened a promo day after a few months to refresh the project, with street demonstrations of sewer jetting.
- Routinely distributed press releases and arranged regular media coverage of the campaign, including TV.
- Arranged an educational visit to East Preston Primary School, so that children might take FOG messages home to their families.
- Targeted nursing homes via a local email campaign.
- Arranged for Southern Water to agree to provide apprenticeships to those prisoners operating this novel recycling scheme once they have satisfactorily completed their custodial sentences.

OUTCOMES

- FOG-related sewer blockages in East Preston drop from 119 to 51 – a huge fall of 57%.
- 1,400 people view the FOG film in the first fortnight. It's also widely reported in the media, including ITV.
- Company's reputation benefits from positive media coverage of this 'off the wall' FOG initiative which has also drawn praise from stakeholders such as Brighton MP Caroline Lucas who said: "Offering an oil

collection service to residents is not only a great way to cut down on waste but also a good and sound way to protect the environment."

- In the first year of the scheme more than 10,000 litres of cooking oil which might otherwise have been poured down the plughole have been collected and converted into 8,880 litres of biofuel – enough to fill the fuel tanks of 270 Ford Fiestas.
- The recycled oil has already provided enough biofuel for a family car to drive 16 times around the world's circumference.
- Cost benefits for Southern Water because bi-products of recycled cooking oils include glycerine which can be used instead of methanol in the treatment of wastewater. To date 1,835 litres of glycerine have been produced.
- Sustained employment for prisoners because the cooking oil is converted into biofuel which is sold commercially to help fund the scheme.
- Scheme extended in 2013/14 to prisons in Hampshire, Surrey and Kent.

Because of the success of the project, a training scheme has been developed which allows prisoners to gain professional qualifications, helping them to secure employment when released. Industry standard qualifications and work experience to build employment skills are vital components of a successful transition from prison to the workplace. This project has created the first ever qualification in 'Safe Production of Biofuel from Used Cooking Oil' and, to date, over 60 offenders have completed the course.

The initiative has also been recognised by the Innovation Unit which works in partnership with the Cabinet Office.

BUDGET

£20,000 to finance the scheme which is now self-funding.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

It costs £200 to send two operatives with a heavy jetter to clear a sewer blockage. With blockages in East Preston dropping from 119 to 51, the annual saving is £13,600 from relieving the Pain in the Drain.