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DON'T USE COPPER SULFATE TO KILL TREE ROOTS SAYS METRO WASTEWATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT

DENVER — The agency that provides sewage treatment for more than 50 cities and sanitation districts in the Denver metro area says using products containing copper sulfate to kill tree roots that may be invading homeowners' sewer pipes is a bad idea, and homeowners shouldn't do it.

"Despite the availability of copper sulfate or advice some people may have gotten to use it to kill invading tree roots, we're asking people not to use it," said Theresa Pfeifer, who heads the industrial waste control program for Metro Wastewater. "The copper could end up in the South Platte River or in our biosolids."

"Homeowners can get tree roots out of their sewers in three main ways," said Kathy Jeffrey, a CSU Denver County Cooperative Extension Master Gardener who works at Metro Wastewater.

"One is to call a licensed plumber, who can either use mechanical devices to remove roots or a product called RootX, which has a chemical called dichlobenil as the active ingredient. Dichlobenil will destroy the roots without harming the tree," she said.

She also said homeowners willing to tackle the job themselves can buy mechanical clean-out devices and products such as Roebic's Foaming Root Killer, which also contains dichlobenil as the active ingredient.

"For their own safety, we don't recommend that homeowners try to replace root-clogged sewers themselves. It can be a huge job, and it's pretty radical," she said.

Because the drought in Colorado has lasted so long, Jeffrey said trees are sending roots out to find water wherever they can. From the tree's standpoint, a household sewer is a great place for it to get a drink. The sewer has water and the sewage contains nutrients.

"Tiny root tendrils can find a crack or a joint in the sewer line and enter there," she said. "As they grow, they make the crack bigger or push the sewer pipe apart at a joint. Either way, it can be costly trouble for homeowners.

"Sewage can back up in people's homes, or their sewer can be destroyed."

Metro said homeowners are responsible for repairs to their own household sewer lines.

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