



## **WASTEWATER OPERATORS: "DON'T FLUSH WIPES!"**

By Cristina Tuser

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As the toilet paper shortage continues during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, people are turning to disposable wipes, which is clogging sewer systems.

As the toilet paper shortage continues, people are turning to alternative options, including disposable wipes, for bathroom needs.

Sewer Officials across the nation are urging residents to avoid flushing paper towels, tissues, napkins and flushable wipes.

Sweatshirts, bandanas and disposable wipes have been appearing in Naperville, Illinois' sewage system, according to Amy Ries, deputy director of the city's water and wastewater utility.

In recent weeks, the city has seen an increase in the number of disposable wipes, clothing items and disposal diapers for both children and adults.

Disposable wipes, which are not flushable, are an issue for municipal sewers and wastewater treatment facilities because the wipes act like felt and knot together, causing blockages in pipes. They can also break pumps that carry waste to the next phase and those who flush wipes also risk damaging their home's internal pipes.

Contrary to prior belief, hot grease poured down a drain only exacerbates the issue, since the grease hardens like concrete. As customers flush the wipes, they are typically covered in grease, oil, hair and waste, which coat them in a thick layer of grim and prevent them from breaking down.

"In these times when we're confronting a major health crisis, the addition of health hazards created by clogged pipes and blocked sewers are situations we don't need and that are quite avoidable".

Disposable wipes are a convenient and easy-to-use product that serve a variety of helpful purposes, many Americans may be using them incorrectly. Misusing disposable wipes can create "fatbergs," which is a term used for masses of waste that clog a sewer system.

Toilet paper is the only acceptable item to be flushed down toilets. Personal care items such as wipes, dental floss, and paper towels don't quickly dissolve in water and should not be flushed.

Other municipal systems, which have reported an increase in wipes being flushed, believe the misconception that toilet paper is in short supply is to blame, officials said.



## **Amid toilet paper frenzy, sewer officials warn: Don't flush these materials down the toilet**

**Marc Kovac and Ryan Miller, USA TODAY**

It's vital to clean surfaces you touch every day amid the coronavirus outbreak. Here are mistakes to avoid.

Those supposedly "flushable" wipes? Be careful with how you dispose of them. Products like wet wipes and disinfectant wipes are for your trash can.

Sewer officials are urging homebound, toilet paper-strapped residents to think twice before flushing other materials down their commodes.

That goes for paper towels, tissues, napkins and the bane of many sewer systems, supposedly flushable wipes.

"They are not flushable, and they are not biodegradable," said Stephen Renner, director of the Department of Sanitary Engineering in Franklin County, Ohio. "They wreak havoc in our system. ... Please don't flush those down the toilet."

Each toilet flush heads from home piping to a community's pipes, pumps and grinders for eventual treatment.

The system accommodates toilet paper, which is made to disintegrate quickly in water. But wipes, diapers and other materials, which don't break down as readily, tend to clog pipes.

That could mean sewer backups into the homes of the perpetrators or of others, as clogs form down the line. The latter often require jet cleaning to clear.

Renner said his county sewer system is seeing an increase in volume, which was expected given the number of people staying in their homes as part of efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"It's to everybody's benefit to use toilet paper only," he said.

Wipes might be able to flush, but then the 'unseen problems begin'

While disposable wipes are a convenient and easy-to-use product that serve a variety of helpful purposes, many Americans may be using them incorrectly.

Whether it's flushing a non-flushable wipe or using antibacterial products to excess, misusing disposable wipes can create costly "fatbergs," a term used for masses of waste that clog a sewer system.

While there is debate over whether wipes labeled as "flushable" are truly safe for sewers, non-flushable products like baby wipes, wet wipes and disinfectant wipes are for your trash can.



*A mound of disposable wipes clogged the sewers in Charleston, South Carolina, in October 2018, disrupting service for days and costing the local water utility more than \$140,000 in damage and cleanup costs. (Photo: Photo courtesy of Charleston Water System)*