

The Myth of “Flushable” Wipes

There are a wide variety of cloth-like wipes available that are labeled as “flushable”. In recent years, these products have become a major source of problems for wastewater collection systems. Unlike toilet paper that dissolve when mixed with water, cloth-like wipes stay in one piece, lodging in pipes and wrapping around the equipment used to move wastewater.

Unfortunately, many wipe products are labeled as flushable, thus encouraging users to do so. There is an industry standard that was developed to test the flushability of wipes. It only evaluates if a product is physically capable of travelling through a flushing toilet, and pays no regard to what will happen afterwards.

Flushed wipes can easily lodge in either the service connection piping or the main sewer line, causing a backup that floods the building or spills sewage into the environment. Flooding from blocked service connections, (the pipe from the building to the sewer main), is typically not the responsibility of the sewer service provider, and is often not covered by property insurance, forcing the owners to pay for cleanup and repairs out of their own pockets.

In sewer mains, wipes will collect on obstructions like offset pipe joints or intruding roots to block the flow in the pipe. This causes sewage to back up in the main and eventually to travel up individual service connections and out of building floor drains. This material often weaves and tangles together to completely obstruct equipment and must be cut away by hand to prevent equipment damage or failure. Not a pretty picture.

The costs generated by flushed wipes include the increased cleaning of sewer mains by jet truck flushing to clear of obstruction. The other potential cost is of the repairs to Lift Station pumps when they become clogged by wipes. Since all costs of operation are ultimately paid by the sewer users, any increases from excess cleaning must also be passed on.

To prevent wipe-related backups and expenses, there are two options. First, stop using cloth-like wipes and instead use true paper products like toilet paper. These products will completely break down very quickly in water. Second, stop flushing cloth-like wipes to the sewer; instead put them in the trash. Either option will save you money through controlling wastewater treatment costs and give you peace of mind that your chance of having a sewer backup is much lower.

Remember: If you are using cloth-like wipes, please dispose of them in the trash.

Wipes clog pipes!