



ARE YOU GUILTY of Using the Toilet as a Trashcan?

By Nick Jackson, Circuit Rider for the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems

While traveling across the state making visits, I had stopped into several towns and facilities asking this same question: What are the most troublesome issues you have experience within your wastewater collection or treatment system? Surprisingly the answer wasn't what I thought – you know, aging infrastructure or treatment facilities. No, it was what goes down the toilet and into the wastewater collection system.

Although the things that you may flush down the toilet may escape your home's plumbing, the sewage blockages that occur in the larger pipes affect many more people than just your family. If what you do flush down the toilet does not make it out of your home's plumbing, the damage it can cause can be costly.

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Backed-up drains and sewers often mean that the sanitary systems require rodding or jetting. What's usually the culprit? Everything that isn't supposed to go down the toilet! These backups can also affect other sanitary equipment such as lift stations, bar screens, grinders, pumps, etc. which can become worn out prematurely because of what goes down the toilet.

We know it is tempting to flush nearly anything down the toilet. It's like a black hole; just dump, flush, and it's gone – out of sight out of mind. To do this, however, is to risk damaging septic tanks, wastewater collection system, and wastewater treatment centers, as well as causing toxic environmental pollution and the embarrassment that comes if you are found to be the cause of the problem. People don't think about this until one day they have a huge clog or septic tank problem and must spend lots of money to fix it.

WHAT NOT TO FLUSH

To help you save embarrassment, thousands of dollars in repairs, and avoid polluting the environment, pay attention to this list of things that you must never, EVER, flush down the toilet:

"Flushable" Wipes • Baby Wipes • Cleaning Wipes • Paper Towels • Tissues

These so-called "flushable wipes" are becoming increasingly popular nowadays. They are also frequently causing clogs and backups in sewage collection pipes and wastewater treatment equipment. Although some of these brands might say they are flushable on the box, DO NOT FLUSH them down your toilet. If you use these products, dispose of them in a trash can.

The other paper products (paper towels and tissues) are designed to stay together when wet and absorb moisture and don't dissolve quickly in water.

Disposable Diapers • Feminine Hygiene Products

Just because there is human waste inside does not mean that they are ok to flush. Baby and adult diapers, as well as feminine hygiene products, are made to absorb and expand when they come in contact with liquids – not break apart in it. Dispose of all these items in the trash, not the toilet.

Fats • Oils • Cooking Grease

Grease should never be poured down any drain, period. It may look like a liquid that can easily be dumped down a drain, but when it cools, it will solidify and clog up your pipes and cause blockages within the collection system. Collect your grease in a container and throw it in the trash.

Hair • Dental Floss • Rubber Bands • String

Most of these items are not biodegradable and can cause severe clogs and environmental damage. Hair, for one, will never dissolve in water – it floats and easily gets caught on its way out into the collection system, snagging whatever comes its way.

Medications

Unused drugs, pills or pharmaceuticals, medical salves, and

ointments, should never be flushed! Although some believe this to be a safe way to dispose of these things, it is not. Toilet water cannot destroy the active ingredients in medicines. The wastewater treatment facilities are not designed to remove various chemicals found in drugs, and that means they are not removed and get pumped back into creeks, rivers or groundwater aquifers. These chemicals are dangerous to people, animals, aquatic life and the environment.

Food

When disposing of leftover food, never flush it down the toilet. Some may argue that food is biodegradable, and it is, but it can lodge in plumbing and create one powerful clog.

Cleansers • Stains • Solvents • Thinners • Pesticides • Fertilizers • Automotive Products

If it is not meant to clean the toilet, don't flush it down. Combinations of these can be acidic, caustic, poisonous fumes or even cause explosions.

Animal Excrement • Cat Litter

Some product say their cat litter is flushable, but with newer water saving toilets, there is just not enough water to keep the litter moving within the collection system which can cause blockage. Dried animal feces gets dehydrated and becomes hard as a rock and may not dissolve – which can get caught somewhere in the collection system.

The list can go on and on, and it's time to take responsibility for using toilets as they were originally intended. What does that leave? Not much! Human excrement and regular toilet paper are the only things you should flush down your toilet.

Even the very thick and plush toilet paper can sometimes be tough to break down. A courtesy flush is occasionally necessary to avoid clogging the drain. We love Charmin Ultra too, but be conservative with your toilet paper use.

Please think twice about flushing these everyday items down the toilet, not only will it save you from causing blockages, but will also keep your community's wastewater system in good working order.



"Flushable" wipes that were causing issues and were pulled from a wastewater collection system in South Dakota.



This sewer main was found to be completely clogged with grease in Madison, SD.