

New study shows 99% of materials causing sewage clogs should never have been flushed



(BPT) - Do you have good flushing habits? Flushing may seem like a simple, routine task, but unfortunately, many people flush items that can cause major problems for local and national sewage systems.

Wastewater agencies and wipes industry experts recently collaborated on the [largest known domestic sewage collection study](#) to help determine what exactly is clogging sewer lines and equipment. The final study results are now available, and they add up to a massive problem.

What do the numbers say?

The study captured, sorted and identified over 1,700 items collected during peak flow times. The materials found included:

- 34.1% non-flushable wipes labeled with the “Do Not Flush” symbol (baby wipes, cleaning wipes, makeup wipes, etc.)
- 64.9% other non-flushable items (paper towels, period products, trash, etc.)
- 0.9% wipes labeled as flushable

Wipes labeled as “flushable” accounted for less than 1% of sewer system debris and were in the process of breaking apart, while the majority of the non-flushable items collected were fully intact.

What's the big deal?

It can be tempting to assume that flushing a non-flushable item occasionally may not be a big deal. However, items like paper towels, baby wipes, makeup wipes, rags and more are not designed to pass through sewage systems at any point in their lifetime.

Unlike flushable wipes made from natural fibers that break down easily, non-flushable items can clog the pipes in your home. Even if they pass through your home's waste system, they can cause problems in your local sewer system and beyond.

The pumps, augurs and pipe networks of municipal wastewater systems are not made to transport or break down these materials. When enough non-flushable items come together, they can congeal to form cement-like fatbergs, which are expensive to remove.

Each year, a significant number of sewer spills occur, many caused when non-flushable products make their way into the wastewater system. These wastewater spills are messy and expensive to clean up. More importantly, wastewater spills threaten public health and the environment.

The cost to the public and you

Fixing problems caused by non-flushable products is quite expensive. A home clog can cost homeowners anywhere from \$175 to more than \$1,000 to fix. Even if you don't pay for a plumber for your pipes, you may end up paying for damage to wastewater systems.

[The National Association of Clean Water Agencies](#) estimates that local public agencies throughout the U.S. (and the ratepayers they represent) spend more than \$440 million each year to respond to sewer overflows caused by inappropriately flushing "Do Not Flush" labeled wet wipes and repair wastewater treatment equipment.

How can you help?

While non-flushable products clogging the nation's sewer systems is a massive problem, everyone can do their part to solve it. You can help by learning and practicing smart flushing habits.

Common household items that you should NEVER flush include:

- Baby wipes, household cleaning wipes and makeup wipes
- Paper towels and facial tissues
- Fats, oils and grease
- Food, trash and plastic bags
- Rags, cloth and disposable gloves
- Cotton balls, cotton swabs and dental floss
- Feminine products
- Hair and hair weaves
- Medications and syringes

Be especially cautious when flushing wipes. In the U.S., 90% of wipes sold are non-flushable. When purchasing and using wipes, look for the "Do Not Flush" symbol on the front of the packaging. If you can't find the symbol, err on the side of caution and dispose of the wipes in your garbage can.

Take care of your pipes and help reduce damage to the nation's sewage systems by practicing smart flushing habits. To learn more about the study, visit FlushSmart.org/CA-Collection-Study-Report.