ANNUAL REPORT

2024



#FlushSmart
CONSUMER EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

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APPENDIX

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

On behalf of the Responsible Flushing Alliance (RFA), I'm pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report, showcasing a year of significant progress in our mission to promote responsible flushing.

While past campaigns successfully increased familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol, we know the true impact lies in changing behavior. This year, we shifted our focus—evolving our strategy with initiatives to help change consumer habits and create lasting change.

RFA commissioned a national survey in March 2024, before this year's #FlushSmartMonth activities, and again in November 2024, post-#FlushSmartMonth, to help show the impact of our efforts. The results revealed improvement in both awareness and behavioral change:

Awareness Nationally: U.S. respondents showed a 3-point increase in familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol from March 2024 (78%) to November 2024 (81%). Those surveyed also showed a 4-point increase in those who felt "very knowledgeable" of non-flushable products from March 2024 (44%) to November 2024 (48%).

Behavior Nationally: U.S. survey respondents showed a 2-point decrease in those who admitted to flushing non-flushable items from March 2024 (53%) to November 2024 (51%).

The 2024 survey also examined YOY data in the state of California, presenting the following results:

Awareness in California: Baseline data from a survey of Californians in 2021 showed a 9-point increase in familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol from November 2021 (69%) to November 2024 (78%). It also showed an 11-point increase in Californians who felt "very knowledgeable" of non-flushable products from November 2021 (37%) to November 2024 (48%).

Behavior in California: Californians surveyed showed a 10-point decrease in those who admitted to flushing non-flushable items from November 2021 (58%) to November 2024 (48%).

To engage younger audiences, we focused on short-form video content. Our efforts included a partnership with the Latino Film Institute's Youth Cinema Project (YCP), a true-crime activation at VidCon Anaheim, and a creative presence on TikTok. This expanded reach increased our cultural relevance, helping make smart flushing part of the broader cultural conversation.

This approach resonated, leading to a breakthrough in broadcast media, with several initiatives securing local news coverage. Given the importance of local journalism (Pew Research Center reported in May 2024 that 85% of Americans surveyed find it important to their communities), this coverage is an effective conduit for public education.

The results detailed in this report, from increased media engagement to a surge in organic social media activity, underscore the impact of our ever-evolving approach. RFA is committed to building on this momentum, developing innovative and culturally relevant campaigns that will further protect our wastewater infrastructure for generations to come.

Sincerely,

President, Responsible Flushing Alliance



Independent studies show that non-flushable items, which are not designed or intended to be flushed, make up 99% of materials that clog or accumulate in equipment at wastewater treatment plants. In October 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 818, now known as the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, to help address this issue. The bill requires pre-moistened non-flushable wipes manufactured on or after July 1, 2022, to be labeled clearly with a Do Not Flush instruction with a symbol and text. It established the California Consumer Education and Outreach Program, which requires the industry to study consumer behavior on the flushing of disposable wipes and establish relevant multimedia education and outreach programs.

The mandates of the law include the following:

- 1. Comprehensive statewide consumer education and outreach campaign. Materials must be in both Spanish and English.
- 2. Multimedia campaign to promote consumer awareness of the Do Not Flush symbol.
- 3. Participate in a sewage collection study.
- **4.** Consumer opinion surveys assessing behaviors and awareness regarding disposal of non-flushable wipes—for five years to measure effectiveness.
- **5.** Provide wastewater agencies with consumer education messaging for the symbol and label notice.
- 6. Report to the Senate and Assembly Committees annually on campaign results and submit a written annual report for posting on the state Water Board website. (This report is the intended fulfillment of this mandate.)

There are six other states with similar laws requiring non-flushable wipes to be labeled with the Do Not Flush symbol.







CHALLENGE

While many producers had implemented the Do Not Flush symbol onto the packaging of non-flushable wipes before the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, we knew education was needed for consumers to notice and understand the symbol's meaning. From 2021 to 2024, RFA commissioned marketing research firm Drive Research to conduct an annual independent consumer survey, measuring consumer awareness and understanding of the disposal of common household products, including non-flushable wet wipes.

Before the launch of our campaign, 69% of consumers in California recalled seeing the Do Not Flush symbol, but only a third of respondents felt knowledgeable about which products were non-flushable. Research indicated that, although half of the respondents were aware that most sewer backups, blockages and clogs are caused by non-flushable items, 60% of consumers self-reported having flushed something non-flushable in the past year. Those respondents cited a lack of education, "assuming the item(s) were flushable," or that they put little thought into the action.

RFA sought to meet the consumer need for education and awareness. Our 2022 campaign kickstarted our #FlushSmart content and resources. The details and success of that campaign can be found in our 2022 Annual Report. While 2022 was successful, we had only begun to scratch the surface of poor flushing habits.

In 2023, we adapted to the shift in overall media consumption— as user-generated, short-form video content rose to popularity online—to ensure our target audiences interacted with our essential message and for #FlushSmart to break onto the scene to create cultural relevance.

The 2023 #FlushSmart consumer education campaign was successful. A follow-up survey conducted in Fall 2023 found that familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol increased by 3 points to 79% of Californian consumers. Additionally, 78% of respondents recognized the importance of the issue to their community, and 91% of our target audiences indicated that seeing our messaging would likely change their flushing habits.

Following the success of our 2023 approach to gain cultural relevancy, we doubled down on our short-form video content approach—this time with a focus on getting our message to younger generations. Young Americans will soon be the stewards of our environment, communities and policies. Our country's sewage and wastewater infrastructure will someday be in their hands, so we must involve them in the conversation now through educational content that will resonate well into the future.





RESULTS OF RFA'S 2024 INITIATIVES:

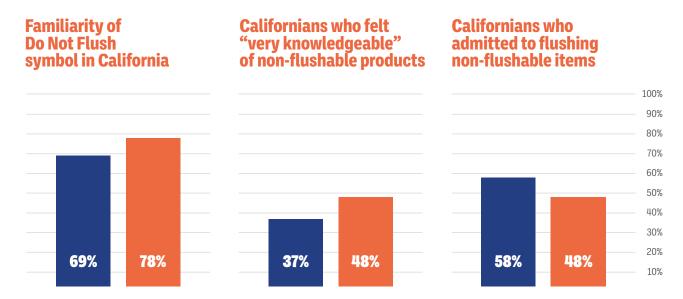
NATIONAL SURVEY

(March 2024 vs. November 2024, pre- and post-#FlushSmartMonth)

- U.S. respondents showed a 3-point increase in familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol from March 2024 (78%) to November 2024 (81%). Those surveyed also showed a 4-point increase in those who felt "very knowledgeable" of non-flushable products from March 2024 (44%) to November 2024 (48%).
- U.S. survey respondents showed a 2-point decrease in those who admitted to flushing non-flushable items from March 2024 (53%) to November 2024 (51%).

CALIFORNIA SURVEY

(YOY data in the state of California, comparisons from November 2021 to November 2024)



- Baseline data from a survey of Californians in 2021 showed a 9-point increase in familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol from November 2021 (69%) to November 2024 (78%). It also showed an 11-point increase in Californians who felt "very knowledgeable" of non-flushable products from November 2021 (37%) to November 2024 (48%).
- Californians surveyed showed a 10-point decrease in those who admitted to flushing non-flushable items from November 2021 (58%) to November 2024 (48%).



2024 BY THE NUMBERS

RESPONSIBLE FLUSHING IN THE NEWS:

4K+

total media mentions for RFA

375+

local TV airings of 10 unique broadcasts segments

print advertorials

43

original earned media placements

+290%

earned media placements year-over-year







RESPONSIBLE FLUSHING ON SOCIAL:

31.2M J∞

total paid social media impressions across TikTok and Meta

23M J∞

total video views of #FlushSmart campaign content across TikTok and Meta

+350%

total video views year-over-year

FLUSHSMART.ORG WEBSITE:

Total Website Visits in 2024:

in 2024:

Visitors in 2024:

Total Website Visitors Total Unique Website Total Website Sessions Average Time on Page in 2024: in 2024:

63,671 56,592 56,030 58,852 41 seconds

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EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

RFA created new evergreen content throughout 2024 for audiences of all ages. From infographics to PSA videos, RFA's educational materials are free and downloadable from our website at flushsmart.org. These materials have been promoted across RFA channels and networks. We have also disseminated them to stakeholders within the wastewater space for use in their educational outreach.

IN 2024, RFA DEVELOPED:

3 infographics

educational video on the Collection Study findings

Flush Smart toolkits

26Flush Smart campaign assets































PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

WASTEWATER PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

YOUTH CINEMA PROJECT WITH LOS ANGELES COUNTY SANITATION DEPARTMENT (LACSD)

RFA teamed up with the Latino Film Institute's (LFI) Youth Cinema Project (YCP), with support from the Los Angeles County Sanitation Department (LACSD), to create a unique PSA film contest to encourage community education.

Together, YCP, LACSD, and RFA designed and judged a youth filmmaking competition for students from YCP's after school program to create PSA videos that increase public awareness of responsible flushing habits and the Do Not Flush symbol on wet wipes packaging.









RFA BLOG POSTS WITH WASTEWATER PARTNERS



CALIFORNIA RELIES ON RECYCLED WATER

RFA had the opportunity to tour the LACSD and learn about the process of recycling water and its impact on our state. LACSD alone serves 5.5 million people and recycles 150 million gallons per day. This blog post details the tour and how clean water is critical to the state's infrastructure and our environment.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: WOMEN OF WASTEWATER

For International Women's Day, RFA partnered with Wendy Wert, an Environmental Engineer for the LACSD, to develop a blog post about Wendy and the small but mighty group of women who play important roles in wastewater throughout the country. Wendy also serves as the President of the American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists. We discussed her passion for the industry, women in wastewater and our new partnership.



WASTEWATER AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY WITH MELODY LABELLA

RFA interviewed Melody LaBella, who has worked with Central Contra Costa Sanitary District for 24 years and currently serves as a Resource Recovery Program Manager. The resulting blog post explores her drive to protect the environment, her time in the wastewater industry and behaviors consumers should change for the betterment of the planet.

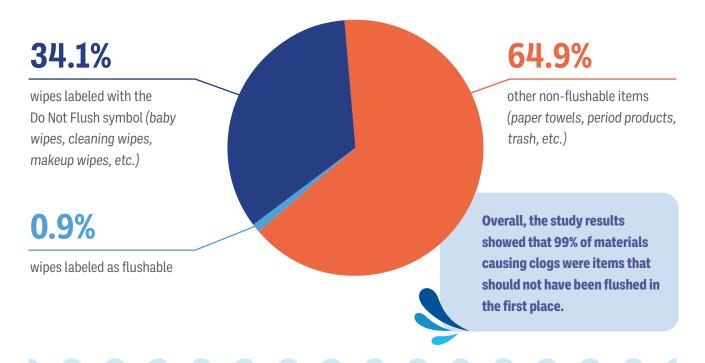


COLLECTION STUDY

On April 4, 2024, the Responsible Flushing Alliance, alongside the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) and the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry (INDA), released the results from the largest known domestic sewage collection study conducted to reveal what's really being flushed down the drain—and shouldn't be.

The collection and material investigation took place in October 2023 at two locations: Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) in Southern California and Central Contra Costa Sanitary District (Central San) in the greater San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California. Wastewater and wipes experts collected, sorted, and identified more than 1,700 items pulled from the two locations during peak flow times. Kennedy Jenks, an independent engineering firm, designed the study and compiled the findings into the final report.

The breakdown of items collected from pipes at the two study locations included:



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Segments on responsible flushing, featuring results from the Collection Study, appeared on Lifetime's 'The Lifestyle List' on May 25 and Daytime TV on May 9. These TV shows air on independent stations throughout the country, generating 365 placements in over 280 local media markets. Additionally, a MAT Release news article on the Collection Study results was distributed in English and Spanish to local and national news outlets, resulting in over 2,000 placements. This coverage was an excellent way for RFA to engage local media and create an impactful means of community education.



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YOUTH CINEMA PROJECT

In April 2024, RFA teamed up with the Latino Film Institute's (LFI) Youth Cinema Project (YCP), with support from the LACSD, to design and judge a youth PSA filmmaking competition for students from YCP's after-school program. Participants received a creative brief with specific guidelines for the PSA to educate consumers on smart flushing habits and promote the Do Not Flush symbol.







RFA provided a grant to fund the competition and monetary awards for the winners to support of YCP's mission. YCP works in the classrooms of Title 1 schools in 14 districts throughout California, integrating filmmaking with 21st-century learning skills. It utilizes a rigorous standards-based curriculum and a hands-on approach that integrates social emotional learning and English Language Arts to provide an equitable and accessible learning experience for students.

Along with a unique educational opportunity, the competition also served as an innovative way to educate young people on the importance of proper flushing and responsible environmental stewardship.

On April 20, competition finalists debuted during a red-carpet event at Bell Gardens High School in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Cash prizes were awarded to the winning production companies with \$1,000 for first place, \$750 for second, \$500 for third, and \$250 for honorable mention. RFA, YCP and LACSD officials joined the student filmmakers and their families to celebrate the award winners, whose videos can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLu4YLfltX0zi72TUKhzUjUiGTYznCGURe

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

PSA Playlist

Before the red carpet event, RFA conducted outreach to local California broadcast stations and online community news outlets, securing attendance and video coverage from CALÓ News, a local news publication focused on telling the stories of Latinos/as/x communities.

RFA also issued two press releases to generate broader awareness—the first introducing the partnership and the second announcing the winning PSA videos. The results: 247 total media placements and 11.3K total press release views. RFA also used photo and video content from the event to continue the momentum and shared the student filmmakers' hard work across the blog and social media pages.



FLUSH SMART MONTH

Flush Smart Day was instituted in 2022 with the enactment of California's Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law. For two years, it furthered the mission of the #FlushSmart consumer education campaign by reminding consumers to look for the Do Not Flush symbol on wipes packaging on July 1. In 2024, we turned it up a notch, extending the #FlushSmart celebration to 31 days instead of just one. July is now Flush Smart Month.

RFA invited manufacturers and wastewater professionals to raise awareness of the importance of proper flushing habits and encourage consumers to look for the Do Not Flush symbol by joining the Flush Smart Month effort. To make it easy, we developed two toolkits with easy-to-use information about flushing smart, including templates for social posts, blog posts and talking points. The first toolkit provided general information and teased the VidCon activation. The second included activation-specific content.







VIDCON ANAHEIM

Teeing up the annual observance of Flush Smart Month 2024 in July, the Responsible Flushing Alliance spread the word on the importance of smart flushing habits in a novel way at VidCon Anaheim 2024 in late June.

Thousands of content creators flocked to the city's convention center for four days of creativity and content creation. RFA joined the mix to catch creators' attention and raise awareness with a new activation as part of its #FlushSmart campaign aimed at resonating with attendees and their viewers.

RFA's interactive activation at VidCon took place in a booth designed as a film-noir inspired bathroom crime scene. Detective Vincent Drains and his very surprising partner—a singing and talking toilet named Mel—kicked off the investigation to uncover the city's elusive underboss, the Clog Monster.

The crime-fighting duo also took over RFA's social accounts with a paid media campaign featuring three 15 second film-noir stylized animated videos that urged viewers to help them end toilet crimes by looking for the Do Not Flush symbol.













The creative narrative was also featured across RFA's website, social channels and in newsletters to the wastewater and wipes industries to unite all citizens in spreading awareness for #FlushSmart month.

RFA is always looking for creative ways to ensure people look for the Do Not Flush symbol on wipes packaging and used the immersive experience and social media engagements to inspire attendees. The captivating, out-of-the-box PSA showcased RFA's creative approach to spreading an important message to a key audience: members of Gen Alpha and Z. These media-savvy consumers of video content are the future of our country and deserve to have awareness and agency in how their infrastructure will serve them tomorrow. Responsible flushing habits are vital in preserving wastewater infrastructure and supporting healthy communities well into the future.



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VidCon's vibrant landscape, teeming with 55,000+ digital content creators and fans, provided the ultimate test grounds for RFA's unconventional approach. Amidst a sea of colorful activations, the eye-catching film noir booth—complete with the mysteriously catchy tunes of Mel, the talking toilet—stopped attendees in their tracks.

By transforming the mundane into an intriguing true-crime narrative, RFA sparked conversations—both in person and across the digital sphere.

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

The 2024 #FlushSmart campaign resulted in 25 earned media placements, a 500% increase from the previous year. Thirteen of these were broadcast placements in local communities, including a segment on KCAL News on CBS Los Angeles.

This surge in earned media placements translated into widespread visibility, with every placement mentioning RFA and 90% incorporating educational messaging about responsible flushing. Nearly half of all placements featured the Do Not Flush symbol.

RFA also witnessed a 350% surge in video views across TikTok and Meta, reaching 23 million total views. This remarkable growth, fueled by engaging content and paid promotion, amplified the campaign's reach and impact.

In terms of organic engagement, the campaign sparked genuine enthusiasm, **generating 49 social posts from industry stakeholders and 19 organic posts from engaged consumers.** Notably, the City of San Diego, one of the largest markets in California, posted its own content on social media about Flush Smart Month, including the #FlushSmart hashtag. This organic buzz, driven by compelling storytelling, exposed the message to a potential audience of 21.8 million users.

By tapping into a popular cultural trend with a compelling storyline about the consequences of improper flushing, RFA successfully disrupted the noise, generating impactful media coverage and spreading awareness.

25 EARNED media placements, a 500% INCREASE from the previous year.



#**FlushSmart**BY THE NUMBERS

25

earned media placements

500% INCREASE

in earned media stories year-over-year

23M

total video views across TikTok and Meta

350% INCREASE

in total video views year-over-year



27M

total paid media impressions



48K

link clicks to FlushSmart.org



49

social posts from stakeholders



4 DAYS

of in-person activation at VidCon Anaheim



1K+

RFA QR code stickers distributed



19

organic social posts featuring RFA activation from VidCon, reaching 21.8M total potential audience





WHO IS RFA?

The Responsible Flushing Alliance is an independent, nonprofit trade association committed to educating consumers about responsible and smart flushing habits to help reduce damage to municipal wastewater systems.

MISSION

Our mission is to provide educational solutions to problems caused by inappropriately flushed products. We work collaboratively with the wipes industry supply chain as well as wastewater, scientific, engineering, and operating entities to better understand and evaluate the scope, contents, and impacts of flushed items on wastewater infrastructure. We want to help spread knowledge regarding proper disposal practices of non-flushable wipes products through prominent, on-package displays of the Do Not Flush symbol, reminding people that if they see it, that wipe goes in the trash and never the toilet.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS

- 3M
- Andritz
- Biom
- California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)
- Clorox
- Cotton Inc.
- Crocodile Cloth
- Crown Abbey
- DUDE Products
- DUKAL, LLC.
- Ecolabs
- Eleeo Brands
- Essity

- First Quality
- GOJO
- Goodwipes
- Guy & O'Neill
- H20 Global News
- Kelheim Fibres GmbH
- Kenvue
- Kimberly-Clark
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
- National Stewardship Action Council (NSAC)
- Nehemiah Manufacturing

- Nice-Pak and PDI
- Papel Aralar S.A.
- Procter & Gamble
- Promescent Delay Wipes
- Reckitt
- Rockline Industries
- Sellars Absorbent Materials
- Spartan Chemical
- Suominen Corporation
- The Center for Baby & Adult Hygiene Products (BAHP)
- Toilet Board Coalition
- Unilever
- WaterWipes





GOALS

- Clear and prominent labeling of non-flushable items and the adoption of smart flushing habits are key to helping solve the problem of wipe accumulations or clogs in wastewater treatment systems. By providing education and resources to government agencies, wastewater groups, sanitation agencies, and other stakeholder groups, together we can arm consumers with the information they need to make smart flushing decisions.
- Changes to flushing behaviors will help free up consumer tax dollars and city resources that are now used to repair wastewater systems damaged by clogs.
- To provide factual information and data on the issue to counter the high level of misinformation communicated in the media.

OUR GROWTH OVER THE YEARS

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Impressions	1,500	8.4M	30.7M	47.2M
Clicks	N/A	127K	167.1K	48K
Video Views	N/A	N/A	12.4M	23M
Media Mentions	N/A	1,630	2,918	4,000





#FlushSmart