

## Protecting Your Sewer Systems and Septic Tanks!

The best way to protect your sewer system or on-site septic tank system from clogs and costly repairs is to make sure that you don't use your toilet as a trash can. The only safe non-human material to flush down the toilet is toilet paper because it is dispersible, meaning that it falls apart when moved around in water.

Disposable wet wipes, a product once used mainly for wiping baby bottoms, are increasingly being used in a much larger adult market. Although many of the wipes are labelled as "flushable" the problems that adult wet wipes have created for municipal sewer systems are serious. When the wipes enter the sewers they clog the lines and sewage pumps at the wastewater utility plants. In communities with old smaller pipes the wipes build up and cause blockages as soon as they enter the sewer system, resulting in costly repairs. Wet wipes can also clog home septic systems by clumping into masses that can block the line to the tank or block the tank inlet, and cause back-ups of sewage into the basement.

The biggest problem with the wipes is that they are "nondispersible," which means that they will not break apart as soon as the toilet is flushed and completely break up within 5 minutes, like toilet paper does. These products are made of non-woven fabrics, manufactured by entangling fibers in a sheet or web structure, and bonding them mechanically, chemically, or thermally. The fibers are not knitted or woven as conventional fabrics are. This makes them very durable and that is great for many other uses, but not good for flushing down the toilet.

Another problem is that many of the wipes are never meant to be flushed in the first place and people don't realize that or misread the labels and many wipes that are supposed to be flushable still do not break up in the sewer system or septic tank. Analysis of clogs of sewers and sewage pumps show that the materials causing clogs are usually a mixture of different types of wipes, both flushable and non-flushable, plus some other items such as paper hand towels and feminine hygiene products. However, these analyses also show that wipes, including those labeled as flushable, do not break up after flushing as often advertised, but tend to stay in one piece.

Your toilet may seem like a convenient way to get rid of certain unwanted items-you flush it and they disappear. However, toilets are only intended to get rid of human waste and toilet paper. Everything else you might be tempted to flush should usually be bagged and disposed of with your regular garbage.

Here is a list of **What Not** to flush:

# It's a Toilet, Not a Trash Can!

Never flush the following items (or put them down the garbage disposal or drain).  
Toss them in the trash instead.

- Baby/Facial/Cleaning Wipes
- Tampons
- Sanitary Napkins
- Medication
- Hair
- Dental Floss
- Cotton Swabs/Balls
- Bandages
- Rags and Towels
- Rubber Items (like latex gloves)
- Fat, Cooking Oil, Grease
- Clothing Labels
- Candy/Food Wrappers
- Syringes
- Cigarette Butts
- Disposable Toilet Brushes
- Kitty Litter
- Aquarium Gravel
- Plastic Items
- Diapers
- Fruit Stickers
- Paper Towels



If you have any questions about what is flushable you may call Summit SWCD at 330-926-2452, or contact the Summit County Public Health at 330-923-4891.

## References:

Water Environment Federation  
*Chemical & Engineering News*  
National Association of Clean Water Agencies