

Wipes Clog Pipes!

(Flushable Wipes ARE NOT Flushable)

The use of “disposable wipes” or towelettes has increasing during the pandemic, leading to costly damage to sewer pipes and pump stations serving Macomb and Oakland counties. Experience in the Village is no different.

Labeling on packages of these towelettes or wipes indicates they are disposable with some packages claiming they are flushable and biodegradable. However, Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice S. Miller and Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner Jim Nash have emphasized that wipes should never be flushed. “It’s unfortunate that people continue to flush these wipes. It is causing more problems and more expense for every sewer system,” Miller said. “Throw them in the garbage after use. DO NOT flush them down the toilet.”

“Wipes form clumps that grow into hard masses creating blockages in sewer pipes,” said Nash. “They are not safe for the sewer system and should not be flushed down the toilet. We are seeing an uptick of issues specifically at the Oakland-Macomb Interceptor sewer system and pumping station. It is taking crews longer than expected to clean the systems due to the build-up of ‘flushable’ wipes. The cost of cleaning the wipes is costly to the system and its rate-payers.”

With many people working from home for more than half of 2020 and into 2021, and most school-children attending classes virtually from home, heavy use of the wipes increased and continues today.

Miller said the problem is a global one. In the United States, it could

collectively cost municipalities hundreds of millions of dollars in costs to deal with the wipes, she said.

For years, Miller has encouraged people to stop flushing disposable wipes because they clog sewer systems, damage the pumps, make pumping stations less efficient, and can cause sewage backups. She has emphasized that wipes are not biodegradable as some manufacturers claim. “They don’t break down like toilet paper,” Miller added.

Meantime, the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) recently received a National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) 2021 National Environment Achievement Award in the Public Information and Education category for its video, “Flushables.” The video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u-KGEH75_E. The video is a regional collaboration between GLWA, the Macomb County Public Works Office, and the Oakland County Water Resources Commission.

Source: <https://publicworks.macombgov.org/publicworks-UseOfDamagingWipesAppearsToBeIncreasing?webdesign=adaptive>.

Village Trustee and Sewer Commissioner, Steve Clark regularly repeats the above concern at Council Meetings, which is taped for local Cable Channel Six airplay. Flushable wipes are clogging Village sanitary sewer lines and causing issues at the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP). This costs the Village money which in turn is reflected in yearly Sewer Rates that are charged back to Village Customers.

An additional caution is that these can easily get stuck in a homeowners or business sanitary system as well. Since the Village no longer helps clean out obstructions in private sewer lines as they did in the past, the cost to unplug a clogged system is solely that of the owner.

Other Items to Never Flush Down the Toilet (even if they are labeled “flushable”) are:

- Facial Tissues
- Paper Towels
- Baby Wipes/Personal Hygiene Wipes
- All-Purpose Cleaning Wipes
- Diapers/Adult Diapers
- Cigarette Butts
- Dental Floss
- Cotton swabs
- Feminine hygiene products
- Shop/Cleaning Rags
- Towels
- Latex Gloves
- Mop Heads
- Hair Weaves/Extensions

Source: <https://askhrgreen.org/campaign/what-not-to-flush/>.

For Further Information, Contact: Steve Clark, Sewer Commissioner, 586-784-9151