

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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What's Flushable?

At one point in our lives, whether we remember it or not, our parents potty trained us and taught us proper bathroom etiquette. However, some disturbing recent trends indicate that people believe toilets to be multi-purpose garbage disposals. Yet using your toilet as a trash can results in serious plumbing problems in your home, septic tank or your municipalities sewer pipes and wastewater treatment plants.

The problem stems from a misunderstanding of what is flushable. A good rule of thumb is only flush **the three P's-pee, poop and paper (toilet)**. If it isn't human waste or toilet paper it belongs somewhere else – it is that simple. Here is a list of items people commonly flush which they shouldn't. Just incase you need a reminder.

Sanitary products, paper towels, facial tissue, rubber gloves, wipes, dental floss and hair: One of the large retailer websites lists over 600 various kinds of wipe products. That's a lot of wipes that shouldn't be going down your toilet. All of these items will clog your system. Users feel like its okay to flush items because of misleading marketing of products labeling them as "flushable" and "safe for septic systems." Wipes are not flushable-period.

Unused drugs (prescription and over the counter): Wastewater plants and septic systems are not designed to remove drugs and medication that are flushed down a toilet. By flushing these items, they could end up in our surface water and groundwater. Do NOT flush medicine down the toilet unless accompanying product information instructs otherwise. Don't keep unneeded medications in the home. Medicine collection events staffed by law enforcement, if readily available, are also good options for safely disposing of unwanted medicine. If you do need to dispose of unwanted medicine follow this procedure

- 1) Pour medicine into a sealable plastic bag.
- 2) If the medicine is a solid, add a small amount of water to dissolve it.
- 3) Add coffee grounds, kitty litter or something similar to the liquid medicine in the plastic bag.
- 4) Seal the bag and immediately dispose of it in the trash.
- 5) Use a marker to black out any personal contact information on the empty medicine container prior to disposing of it in the trash.
- 6) For more information, consult www.nh.gov/medsafety. Disposal information for household generated sharps may also be found on this website.

Other non-flushable items, but are frequently found at wastewater treatment plants, include: rags/towels, cotton swabs, syringes, candy and food wrappers, clothing labels, cleaning sponges, toys, cigarette butts, and disposable toilet brushes.

Plumbing and sewer blockages, and contamination to our surface and groundwaters are not only caused by items flushed down the toilet, but caused just as easily by items inappropriately put

down the sink drain. Just because it has a “garbage disposal” doesn’t mean it’s a trash can. Keep these items out of your sink drain:

Fat, Oils and Grease: stick to the inside of your pipes and solidify over time causing more back ups. The proper way to dispose of grease, fat and oils is to let them cool and harden and then mix them with other absorbent food waste and put them in a jar, container or bag before disposing of them in the trash. You can also take waste vegetable oil to a local collection site where this waste can be turned into a fuel.

Hazardous Household Materials: such as motor oil, chemicals, paint, stains and pesticides all contain toxic material which when released into the drain can have detrimental effect on drinking water. There are specific ways to dispose of these types of materials, for more information contact the DES HHW program

<http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/>

Food, Coffee Grounds and Eggshells: Composting is the best way to get rid of food waste and create a product you can use next season in your garden or flower beds. Use your garbage disposal in moderation and use a drain screen to catch excess food. Never put coffee grounds and eggshells in the garbage disposal.

Your bathroom etiquette re-education is now complete. Just remember that only **the three P’s- pee, poop, and paper (toilet) are flushable**. And don’t forget to wash your hands.

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