

# NEWSLETTER Spring 2020



Kitsap County Public Works | Sewer Utility



Disinfectant wipes are not designed to break down in water and should not be flushed



Don't be tempted to flush paper towels, napkins, or facial tissue – these can cause clogs



All wipes, even ones labeled "flushable," can clog pipes – only flush toilet paper

## SEWER SYSTEMS SEEING INCREASE IN NON-FLUSHABLES



Wipes being removed at a Kitsap County pump station

As there have been shortages of toilet paper due to COVID-19, the Kitsap County Sewer Utility continues to remind all residents not to flush items such as wipes, paper towels, napkins, and facial tissues. Toilet paper is the **ONLY** product that is safe to flush. Wipes, even those marketed as flushable, can cause clogs in your plumbing and in sewer and septic systems.

Kitsap County sees a direct correlation between the increase of wipes used and an increase in clogs in the County's pipes and pumps. The maintenance crews have stepped up the frequency in cleaning mains, especially in problematic areas. Recently there was a blockage causing a sewage overflow into a ditch. The crews had cleaned this main the week prior. Typically, most mains only need to be cleaned once or twice a year so this shows the impact of flushing wipes. We have also increased maintenance for several pump stations, in some instances installing traps to catch material before it causes mechanical failures.

Other utilities in the region have had issues as well. Local reporter Chris Dunagan covered some of this in his blog with the Puget Sound Institute at University of Washington. Visit his blog "Our Water Ways" at [pugetsoundinstitute.org](http://pugetsoundinstitute.org) for details.

Sewer Utility crews are responsible for cleaning the County's pipes and they frequently clear blockages. However, homeowners are responsible for blockages in their side sewers which connect from your home to the main lines in the streets.

The most common cause of sewer spills is improper disposal of items that should not go down the drain in residential areas. Please help us prevent sewer spills by only flushing human waste and toilet paper.

## WIPES CLOG PIPES

Kitsap County has seen an increase in non-flushables in our sewer systems. Please do not use your toilet as a trash can. Help prevent sewer spills by only flushing human waste and toilet paper.

Visit [www.KitsapGov.com/pw](http://www.KitsapGov.com/pw) and click on "Environment" to learn more about how you can protect your sewer line and other helpful tips.

# NEW WASHINGTON LAW TO LABEL DISPOSABLE WIPES

On March 25, Governor Jay Inslee signed into law House Bill 2565 that will require “Do Not Flush” labeling on certain disposable wipes including cleaning (disinfectant) wipes, cosmetic wipes, and baby wipes. The law goes into effect on July 1, 2022.

The law states that creating labeling standards for disposable wipes products will protect public health, the environment, water quality, and public infrastructure used for the collection, transport, and treatment of wastewater. Wipes already approved for sale and labeled as “flushable” will not be affected. The law does not address standards on flushability of these products.

There is still much debate over the degradability of flushable wipes between manufacturers and sewer utilities not only in Washington State but nationwide. The utilities encourage customers not to flush any wipes at all because of the blockage problems they see daily in private service lines and in public main pipelines. However, the new labeling law is an important step forward in consumer awareness. As flushable wipes have become more prevalent, so has the habit of flushing wipes in general. We hope that this labeling will help people stop and think before they flush.

There are specific guidelines for placement and size of the labeling described in the law. Manufacturers have two years to adhere to these guidelines to sell products in the state of Washington. Cities and counties have concurrent and exclusive authority to enforce this law and penalties. Washington is the first state to enact a wipes labeling law. For more information, visit [leg.wa.gov](http://leg.wa.gov).



Look for this symbol from the INDA (Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry) to be displayed clearly on non-flushable disposable wipes sold in Washington.

## EPA ENCOURAGES AMERICANS TO ONLY FLUSH TOILET PAPER

Wipes are causing problems in our sewer systems nationwide. The EPA posted the following public notice on April 1, 2020: Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is encouraging all Americans to only flush toilet paper, not disinfecting wipes or other non-flushable items that should be disposed of in the trash. Flushing only toilet paper helps ensure that the toilets, plumbing, sewer systems and septic systems will continue working properly to safely manage our nation’s wastewater. While EPA encourages disinfecting your environment to prevent the spread of COVID-19, never flush disinfecting wipes or other non-flushable items. These easy steps will keep surfaces disinfected and wastewater management systems working for all Americans.

Preventable toilet and sewer backups can pose a threat to human health and present an extra challenge to our water utilities and their workforce. Flushing anything other than toilet paper, including disinfecting wipes, can damage internal plumbing, local sewer systems and septic systems. Fixing these backups is costly and takes time and resources away from ensuring that wastewater management systems are otherwise working properly. EPA thanks wastewater utilities and their workforce for their courageous efforts at a time when resources may be stretched thin. Having fully operational wastewater services is critical to containing COVID-19 and protecting Americans from other public health risks. Our nation’s wastewater employees are everyday heroes who are on the front line of protecting human health and the environment every single day.

For the latest information from EPA about COVID-19 and water, see: [www.epa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.epa.gov/coronavirus)

