



## No wipes down the pipes



**f**  
73

**t**  
5

**in**  
5

**e**  
3

**KAREN CYSON, TIMES WRITERS GROUP**

1:02 p.m. CDT September 17, 2015

*People believe if an item can be flushed down the toilet or fit down the sink drain then it's OK to do so. But cities are finding out this dispose-by-flushing mindset has come with a huge cost.*



(Photo: Kimm Anderson, kanderson@stcloudtimes.com)

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **'Fat-berg' of supposedly flushable wipes had blocked a system near London**
- **Items put into wastewater system often clog and even break that system**
- **Wastewater treatment facilities state only toilet paper and human waste should be flushed.**

Decades ago, as a first-time home buyer of a vintage home, I encountered many challenges. The mid-dinner-party blown fuse. The where-is-the-water-shut-off? panic when the in-laws visited. And the omnipresent stinky garbage disposal.

I didn't use the garbage disposal. I didn't understand the concept of grinding up food waste just to make the wastewater treatment folks clean out the micro pieces before the water went back into the river. Who would do that?

Despite my best efforts, including ice cubes, lemon juice and store-bought cleaning products, the disposal stunk up the kitchen, so after a few months I had it taken out. Food waste goes in the compost, and I have a clear conscience regarding what goes down the drain.

Do you ever think about what goes down your drain? Our sanitary sewer systems and wastewater treatment are municipal services we rarely consider and probably take for granted. Their ability to keep our cities clean and free of disease is a given.

Aren't you glad you don't live in the suburb of London where the system was shut down and streets dug up for six months? A "fat-berg" of supposedly flushable wipes had blocked the system. A "fat-berg" that weighed 15 tons.

It seems people believe if an item can be flushed down the toilet or fit down the sink drain then it's OK to do so. But what cities large and small are finding out is this dispose-by-flushing mindset has come with a huge cost.

Main lines and lateral lines are clogging with clumps of wipes, cosmetic applicators, dental floss and more. These objects also bind around pumps and cause outages and repair problems.

New York City has spent millions cleaning clogs. Wyoming, Minnesota, is suing six manufacturers of supposedly flushable wipes. Beloit, Wisconsin, in an effort to get the message across, has adopted the slogan "No Wipes Down The Pipes."

Wastewater treatment facilities across the country are trying to get this message out: Only toilet paper and human waste should be flushed.

Anything else is going to clump, clog, bind up and cause huge problems and possible equipment failures.

The list of "anything else" includes baby wipes, cosmetic wipes, cotton pads and balls,

### TOP VIDEOS



**DiGi Hear Me?**  
02:23



**Times Editorial Board Interview - House 13A**  
40:46



**DiGi Hear Me: House speaker touts accomplishments of 2014 session**  
02:10



**DiGi Hear Me- DFL leader touts gains at Capitol this session**  
02:14

### MORE STORIES



**Attend 2 forums to learn about bond levy**  
Sept. 29, 2015, 1:57 p.m.



**Need home care? Learn what to ask**  
Sept. 29, 2015, 11 a.m.

**Education is key to end bullying**

dental floss, feminine hygiene products, cotton swabs, facial tissue, and, well, anything else that isn't human waste or toilet paper.

For you toddler readers this includes crayons, Legos and Matchbox & Hot Wheel cars.

Whatever you put down the drain has to be removed at the end of the line. It's even worse when those items bind and clog the machinery.

Please be considerate when disposing of your personal products. I can't imagine that any of us wants to pay part of a shared bill for a system failure.

*This is the opinion of Karen Cyson, a child-care provider in Stearns County and vice president of Minnesota Mensa. Her column is published the third Friday of the month.*

### Recommended reading

If you're interested in wastewater systems, I highly recommend two books, both totally "clean" reading:

"The Ghost Map" by Steven Johnson, the story of the development of the first large municipal sanitary sewer system in London following an 1854 cholera outbreak.

"The Great Stink" by Clare Clark, a murder mystery that follows the story of the work of an engineer on the London project.



Sept. 29, 2015, 10:04 a.m.

 73  
CONNECT

 5  
TWEET

 5  
LINKEDIN

 3  
COMMENT

  
EMAIL

  
MORE