

## Study Results: Dispose Of Your 'Flushable' Wipes In The Garbage

By Jeff Kart



*Only human waste and toilet paper, please. GETTY*

Step away from the toilet. A study tested 101 single-use wipes and **not one of them passed a flushability test**. Instead, the wipes failed to fall apart or disperse safely in tests.

Despite lawsuits and damage to wastewater treatment plants, and newspaper articles warning everyone that "flushable" can be a misleading term, "stop flushing wipes" is clearly falling on deaf ears.

In other words, cleansing and diaper wipes shouldn't be flushed (even if they're labeled as "flushable") because they'll clog sewer systems, according to the first-ever study by Ryerson University in Ontario.

And researcher Barry Orr is frustrated.

"We want to work together with the industry but I am not getting any cooperation to help with education and awareness and I keep asking," Orr said. "Consumers are confused about what can be flushed down toilets. Only human waste and toilet paper is it!"



*Ryerson researcher Barry Orr holds up a build-up of non-flushable wipes retrieved from a wastewater... RYERSON UNIVERSITY*

Orr is a master's student in environmental applied science and management at Ryerson, and a 25-year veteran sewer outreach and control inspector with the city of London, Ontario. He helped prepare a "Defining 'Flushability' for Sewer Use" study for the Municipal Enforcement Sewer Use Group of Canada. Twenty-three of the wipes tested were labeled as flushable by the manufacturer. The researchers created a working model of a home lavatory system, from toilet to sewer.

"Each wipe was then tested to the wastewater industries specifications for toilet and drainline clearance plus disintegration," according to a news release. "The report findings showed that none of the wipe samples fell apart or dispersed enough to safely pass through the sewer system without a risk of clogging or causing damage to infrastructure."

Orr says the report highlights the need for a legislated standard definition for the term "flushable" that ensures that disposal by flushing will be safe for plumbing, sewage plants and the environment.

Right now, wipes can accumulate into nasty **fatbergs** that cost money and time to remove. The city of Toronto, where Ryerson is located, logged almost 10,000 calls a year from 2010 to 2018 from residences with "sewer service line-blocks." The sewer use group (Orr serves as a spokesperson) also has estimated that \$250 million is spent every year across Canada for work related to removing blockages.



Orr says the industry agreed to a voluntary **Code of Practice** for labeling, but have failed to meet that code. "The importance of adhering to the industry Code of Practice for package labelling and the IWSFG flushability specification is stressed as well as the need for these to be adopted as standards rather than voluntary measures," according to a study abstract.

IWSFG stands for International Water Services Flushability Group.

Cynthia A. Finley is director of regulatory affairs for the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, a group member and Washington, D.C.-based association that represents more than 300 public wastewater utilities in the U.S.

The flushability guidelines in use by industry "are not appropriate because they use tests with too much force and turbulence, allowing the wipe to break up much more quickly than it would in a real sewer, where the flow is generally much calmer," Finley said. "Only 60% of the wipe needs to break apart in INDA's high-turbulence test, too. The wipe needs to break apart more completely to prevent it from causing problems with wastewater equipment."

INDA is the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry, which addresses the flushability issue on its website:


We recognize that the appeal of these products comes from the advantages they offer in effectiveness, cleanliness, convenience and ease of use. However, how and where they are used can encourage flushing as the means for disposal which, in certain cases, is not the correct route.

Together, our aim is to reduce the amount of non-flushable material in the wastewater stream. Therefore, it is important that even products which are likely to be flushed (even though not designed to be), and products which do not

meet our Guidelines include the "Do Not Flush" symbol on package labelling. This is why we developed a voluntary labeling Code of Practice which includes a "Do Not Flush" symbol for companies to use on product packaging. Clear communication on packaging will help to educate consumers on the proper disposal route for products and prevent costly problems at home and at wastewater treatment facilities.

The IWSFG flushability specifications were used in testing wipes for the Ryerson study. Orr says wipes that fail that criteria should be labeled as "do not flush." Finley says current voluntary "do not flush" labeling by manufacturers is sometimes small or practically camouflaged.

"To make flushability and labeling specifications mandatory, legislation will need to be passed," Finley added. "Legislation has already been passed in the District of Columbia, and the regulations to implement the legislation are currently in the public comment period. State legislation is currently being considered in California."



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