

USA Today <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/17/coronavirus-causes-toilet-paper-frenzy-sewer-officials-give-warning/5066669002/>

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Sewer officials are urging homebound, toilet paper-strapped residents to think twice before flushing other materials down their commodes.

That goes for paper towels, tissues, napkins and the bane of many sewer systems, supposedly flushable wipes.

“They are not flushable, and they are not biodegradable,” said Stephen Renner, director of the Department of Sanitary Engineering in Franklin County, Ohio. “They wreak havoc in our system. ... Please don’t flush those down the toilet.”

Each toilet flush heads from home piping to a community's pipes, pumps and grinders for eventual treatment.

The system accommodates toilet paper, which is made to disintegrate quickly in water. But wipes, diapers and other materials, which don’t break down as readily, tend to clog pipes.

That could mean sewer backups into the homes of the perpetrators or of others, as clogs form down the line. The latter often require jet cleaning to clear.

Renner said his county sewer system is seeing an increase in volume, which was expected given the number of people staying in their homes as part of efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

“It’s to everybody’s benefit to use toilet paper only,” he said.

Wipes might be able to flush, but then the 'unseen problems begin'

While disposable wipes are a convenient and easy-to-use product that serve a variety of helpful purposes, many Americans may be using them incorrectly.

Whether it's flushing a nonflushable wipe or using antibacterial products to excess, misusing disposable wipes can create costly "fatbergs," a term used for masses of waste that clog a sewer system.

If manufacturers deem a product unsafe to go down the drain, it more than likely will be labeled on the packing.

While there is debate over whether wipes labeled as "flushable" are truly safe for sewers, nonflushable products like baby wipes, wet wipes and disinfectant wipes are for your trash can.



"All wipes will easily flush down your toilet, but that's where the unseen problems begin," said Mike Saia, a communications manager at Charleston Water System in South Carolina.

Saia said problems occur because as customers flush the wipes, they are often covered in grease, oil, hair and waste, which coat them in a thick layer of grim and hinder them from breaking down.

"It creates ropelike clumps that have incredible strength," Saia said. When those clumps reach a choke point, they can completely disrupt the system.

Follow reporters Ryan Miller ([@RyanW_Miller](#)) and Marc Kovac ([@ohiocapitalblog](#)) on Twitter.