



The Word on Wipes

Rethinking what's flushable and what's not

Just because the package says they are disposable, that doesn't mean all pre-moistened personal wipes should be flushed down the toilet. Many pre-moistened wipes don't break down in the sewer system as toilet paper is designed to do. If you check the label, most packaged wipes state that they are not to be flushed down the toilet. Even the wipes that are labeled as flushable may clog sewer lines and pumps and shorten the life of equipment in the sewer system.

Sewer utilities spend millions of dollars each year removing wipes that may mix with fats and grease in sewer lines to form massive clogs. Wipes may also clog pumps or become wrapped around equipment, shortening the life of facilities and requiring replacement sooner than anticipated. In Fort Wayne, that means your bills can go up to pay for a situation that can be avoided if you think before you flush.

The photo below shows the difference between how toilet paper breaks down compared with a wipe. Each beaker was filled with water and placed on a heating element that also vibrates slightly to simulate the conditions in a sewer system. Toilet paper was added to the beaker on the left. After just 5 minutes, it had disintegrated. A pre-moistened wipe was added to the beaker on the right. You can see that after a full day it did not break down at all.



*Toilet paper
after 5 min.*

*Wipe after
24 hours*

Other similar items that should not be flushed include disposable diapers, dental floss, paper towels, and pop-off scrubbers on toilet cleaning wands. These should all go into the trash.

At the national level, utility groups and manufacturers of so-called flushable products are working on an agreement about what should be labeled as flushable and the kind of labeling to be used.

But for now, remember: toilets, and sewer systems, are designed to handle a few basic things, BUT that does NOT include wipes.