

The Township of Rochelle Park DPW reminds residents not to pour cooking oil and grease down the drain.

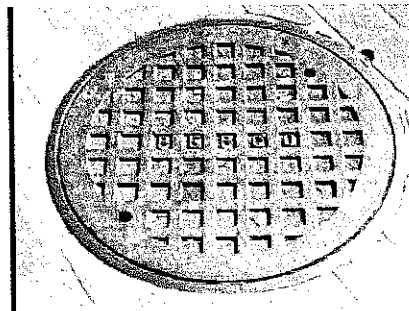
Kitchen grease clogs sewer lines and wastewater pump station. The DPW spends numerous tax dollars removing the grease to prevent sewer backups.

The material should be poured into a sealed container and placed in the trash. Restaurants should have a properly installed and maintained grease trap.

'Flushable' Wipes Clog Ocean City's Sewer System

July 28, 2013 8:07 AM

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OCEAN CITY, Md. (AP) — The growing use of flushable wipes is causing headaches for the people who run Ocean City's sewer system.

The Daily Times reports that the toilet paper substitutes are advertised as safe for toilets, but they can cause problems in the rest of the sewer system.

While toilet paper is designed to fully dissolve within minutes, some brands of wipes don't break down even after hours. That means they can cause sewer clogs, backups and overflows. The buildup of such debris can even clog the sewer system's pumping stations.

Now several times every week, Ocean City workers have to rake out baskets full of flushed wipes to keep some pumping stations flowing.

City officials say they plan to continue updating the system with shredder pumps to accommodate people using wipes.

Flushable wipes clogging sewage systems?

Richard Stradling, Raleigh News and Observer
Published 4:00 am, Thursday, May 28, 2009

In its ceaseless battle to keep sewer pipes from clogging, this North Carolina city has identified several menaces over the years, including grease, cornstarch, packing peanuts and the modern scourge of garbage disposals.

Now the people who run the sewer systems in Raleigh and elsewhere in the country have found a new enemy: flushable wipes.

Tissues and wipes of all stripes get balled up with hair and grease in the city's pipes, creating clogs that send sewage cascading from manholes. The problem has gotten worse in recent years with the introduction of wipes designed to disappear down toilets, Raleigh Wastewater Treatment Superintendent T.J. Lynch said.

Products such as Charmin Fresh Mates and Cottonelle Fresh Flushable Moist Wipes promise consumers a "shower-fresh" feeling for their bottoms, with the convenience of flushability. But, Lynch said, they don't break down the way toilet paper does in the city's pipes.

"What we see a lot of times in the collection system are overflows caused by those types of materials that don't degrade like they're supposed to or they claim to," he said.

Elsewhere in the nation, sewer systems are having similar problems with the flushable wipes. Last month, officials in Sitka, Alaska, asked residents not to flush flushable wipes, saying their workers had been busy untangling them from sewer machinery.

And this spring, Consumer Reports dropped three types of flushable wipes into a beaker of spinning water for a half hour, with results similar to Raleigh's. The magazine also points out that consumers pay a premium for the convenience of flushability.

In a video on the magazine's Web site, and broadcast by television stations across the nation, editor Kim Kleman concludes: "If they're a must-have for your family, we recommend bagging them and tossing them out with the trash rather than flushing."

Raleigh's Lynch knows this from experience and because he asked the city's lab to test several kinds of wipes to see how quickly they break down in water.

The test was simple: Put a wipe or a tissue in a beaker of water with a magnet on the bottom that rotates, creating a vortex not unlike a flushing toilet. The lab put nearly a dozen products through this process, letting them spin for an hour.

Toilet paper begins to break down into a milky mush almost immediately, lab supervisor Darrell Crews said. Other items survived more or less intact. Some, such as Kleenex and other facial tissues, are well-known to people in the sewage business.

"A lot of people flush Kleenex thinking that it's just like toilet paper," Crews said. "But I can tell you, Kleenex doesn't break down. You can stir it, beat on it, it's just not going to break down."

It turns out that flushable wipes don't break down either, Crews said.

Makers of flushable wipes insist they are indeed flushable and safe for sewer and septic systems.

Kimberly-Clark, maker of Cottonelle and Scott flushable wipes, does extensive testing to make sure the wipes won't clog a properly functioning sewer system, spokesman Dave Dickson said. Like other manufacturers, Kimberly-Clark advises customers to flush only one or two wipes at a time.

Dickson said it's possible that people are putting too much down in a single flush or that the wipes are getting caught up with other materials, such as baby wipes that aren't designed to break down.