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Keep Wipes Out Of Pipes

They're great for cleaning sticky hands, grubby faces and messy bottoms, but put simply, wipes block pipes.

"Even though many brands have been marketed as 'flushable' or 'biodegradable', unlike toilet paper, wipes are slow to break down," confirmed Philippe du Plessis, Managing Director, South Gippsland Water.

"They have the potential to get caught up with a range of other solids in your pipes, form blockages, and cause expensive problems both at your end of the pipe and ours."

Wipe-related blockages, often referred to as *wipe balls* or *fat bergs*, cost South Gippsland Water more than \$50,000 a year. They cause damage to pipe networks and pumps, and impact on wastewater treatment once sewerage arrives at the treatment plant.

In August, a Western Water customer in Woodend was \$600 worse off when she needed an emergency after-hours visit by a plumber to unclog her sewer pipe. According to an article published by StarWeekly the blockage was a one-metre solid clump of wipes that caused raw sewage to flow back into the house and out of the toilet and shower.

Also concerned about what gets flushed down the toilet, and the hazard blocked pipes and septic tanks can cause to health and environment, South Gippsland Shire Council has joined forces with South Gippsland Water in the *Keep Wipes Out Of Pipes* campaign.

"Septic tanks are important public health infrastructure on properties, which use bacterial treatment and mechanical separation to prevent our toilet, kitchen, and bathroom and laundry waste water from posing a health risk to our families and others in the community", says Environmental Health Coordinator, Tim Brown.

He adds that, "wipes that block pipes can increase this risk, with the potential for waste backing up into the house or overflowing without being treated. It is certainly in the property owner's interest to protect their system from blockages."

"Wipes are a handy product," adds Mr du Plessis. "Unfortunately, along with their increase in popularity, so too have sewer blockages increased, and it's the water corporation customer that eventually wears the cost of unclogging blocked pipes."

"The solution is simple though. Put the product to good use but, no matter what it says on the packaging, bin them, don't flush them."

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