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World-wide Movement To Keep Wipes Out Of Pipes

In recent weeks South Gippsland Water and South Gippsland Shire Council have joined forces to spread the word about the cost and public health problems associated with the growing incidence of pipes blocked by wipes.

They are not alone though. On the world stage a great deal of attention has been drawn to the issues for water corporations, and indeed householders, when wipes are flushed down pipes.

“The reality is that, unlike toilet paper, wipes are slow to break down and will mass with other solids to form expensive problems at our end of the pipe and yours,” highlighted Philippe du Plessis, Managing Director of South Gippsland Water.

“There is a worldwide push to have wipes and personal hygiene packaging correctly labelled to avoid the confusion generated by brands marketing them as ‘flushable’, ‘safe for septics’ or ‘biodegradable.’”

A recent move by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to take court action regarding the misleading marketing of wipes as flushable has drawn a great deal of attention and support.

“We welcome the ACCC’s announcement and join with water service providers around the world to advocate keeping wipes out of pipes,” confirms Mr du Plessis.

South Gippsland Water estimates that wipe-related blockages cost the Corporation, and therefore customers, more than \$50,000 a year. This is part of the estimated \$15 million (Choice.com.au) spent by Australia’s water service providers each year. The blockages cause damage to pipe networks and pumps, and impact on wastewater treatment once sewerage arrives at the treatment plant.

Tim Brown, South Gippsland Shire Council’s Environmental Health Coordinator explained, “when it comes to household septic systems, flushing wipes can increase the risk of blockages, bringing with it the potential for waste to back up into the house or overflowing without being treated.”

“It is certainly in the property owner’s interest to protect their system from blockages; it will decrease the health risk of raw sewage in the home and save on the cost of calling in a plumber.”

There is general agreement that only the three Ps (pee, poo and paper) should be flushed and that, until there is a standard agreed by water service industries, products currently labelled ‘flushable’ should be labelled ‘Do Not Flush’.

Awareness regarding the issue is mounting and many manufacturers are taking the matter on board and actively investigating ways to reduce the impact of wipes in wastewater systems.

In the meantime, at a local level, the solution is simple. Put this handy product to good use, but no matter what it says on the packaging, put used wipes in the bin not down the toilet.

- ENDS -

Caption: This wet wipe has been soaking in this jar since 6 February 2015, it's still as good as new.



Caption: Wipe-related blockages are costing water service providers around the country millions of dollars each year. (photo courtesy of Sydney Water)

