



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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The toilet is not a trash can.

Our toilets and sewers are designed to dispose of human waste, but all too often people use toilets like a trash can. Using a toilet for dispose of anything other than human waste and toilet paper will often result in blockages in the toilet or sewer lateral which could in turn cause sewage to back up into the building.

Just because the package says "flushable" or "septic safe" doesn't mean it's true. Currently there is no State or Federal standard for flushability, and tests have shown that "flushable" wipes do not degrade as easily as toilet paper. Many municipalities around the state are experiencing major problems with "flushable" products within their sewer systems.

The problem is severe enough that Assemblymember Jared Huffman (representing Marin County and southern Sonoma County) has introduced legislation (Assembly Bill 2256) that would prohibit any consumer product sold in California from being labeled as "flushable" unless it meets certain criteria. The legislature has not yet voted on this bill.

Until a standard of flushability is adopted, it is best to flush only human waste and toilet paper. In particular, items that should not be flushed include:

- Wipes (baby wipes, personal wipes and cleaning wipes, even the "flushable" wipes should not be flushed)
- Wash cloths, rags, clothing (any cloth item)
- Diapers (even "flushable" diapers should not be flushed)
- Napkins, paper towels and facial tissues
- Cotton swabs, cotton balls and bandages
- Dental floss
- Hair
- Tampons/tampon applicators, sanitary pads, and condoms,
- Toilet bowl scrub pads (even "flushable" scrub pads should not be flushed)
- Sheet plastic, or plastic of any kind
- Kitty litter, aquarium gravel, bedding material for small animals such as hamsters '
- Pet waste bags (even those labeled "flushable")
- Any food items
- Medicines, vitamins or other pharmaceuticals
- Syringes
- Toys (A surprising number of toys end up at the wastewater treatment plant. Teach children that the toilet is for one purpose only and be aware that toilets represent a drowning hazard for unattended small children)

Even if these other products make it through the toilet and sewer lateral, they can still cause problem down the line. For buildings that are on septic systems, such products can make it difficult to properly pump out the septic tank. For buildings connected to the sanitary sewer system, such products can cause pipeline blockages and can get tangled in pumps and other structures at the wastewater treatment plant.

Most of the items listed above should be disposed of in the garbage. Medicines and pharmaceuticals can be disposed of at pharmacies and law enforcement stations participating in the Safe Medicines Disposal Program (see [rrwatershed.org/safemeds](http://www.rrwatershed.org/safemeds)). For information on where to dispose of syringes or other items in Sonoma County go to <http://www.recyclenow.org/> or call 707-565-3375. In Mendocino County, go to <http://www.mendorecycle.org/> or call 707-468-9704.

This article was authored by Jay Robinson of the City of Cloverdale and Phoebe Grow of the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA). RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.