



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY



Guy Cregheur

Division head of Gatineau's Waste Water Treatment Plant

“ Only 3 things go into the toilet... Those 3 things -- urine, feces and toilet paper, are fine; it's the dental floss, the hair, condoms, sanitary products and wipes that are clogging waste water plants and causing massive repairs. It's not a garbage, it's a toilet. ”



Joe Pajor

Deputy Director of Public Works and Utilities

“ On "flushable wipes": Some may say, "but my wipes say flushable!" The labelling of flushable/non-flushable wipes is voluntary by the manufacturer. Because it's a voluntary standard they're complying with, they may or may not be as flushable as you might hope or you might think and when they don't break down, then there's a problem in the collection system. ”



Dan Beaudry

Industry worker of Enfield, Connecticut

“ Never put paper towels, feminine products, baby wipes, and face tissues down the toilet. I service many local grocery stores who come across these issues. They're calling me all the time to put hand dryers in, because they want to get rid of the paper towels, just because of that issue. ”



Emily Lloyd

Deputy environmental commissioner

“ You're not going to believe what's happened with baby wipes. Residents bear the extra cost with higher water rates. It's an expense we didn't have before that now we have. ”



Joel Ducoste

Professor in Environmental Engineering

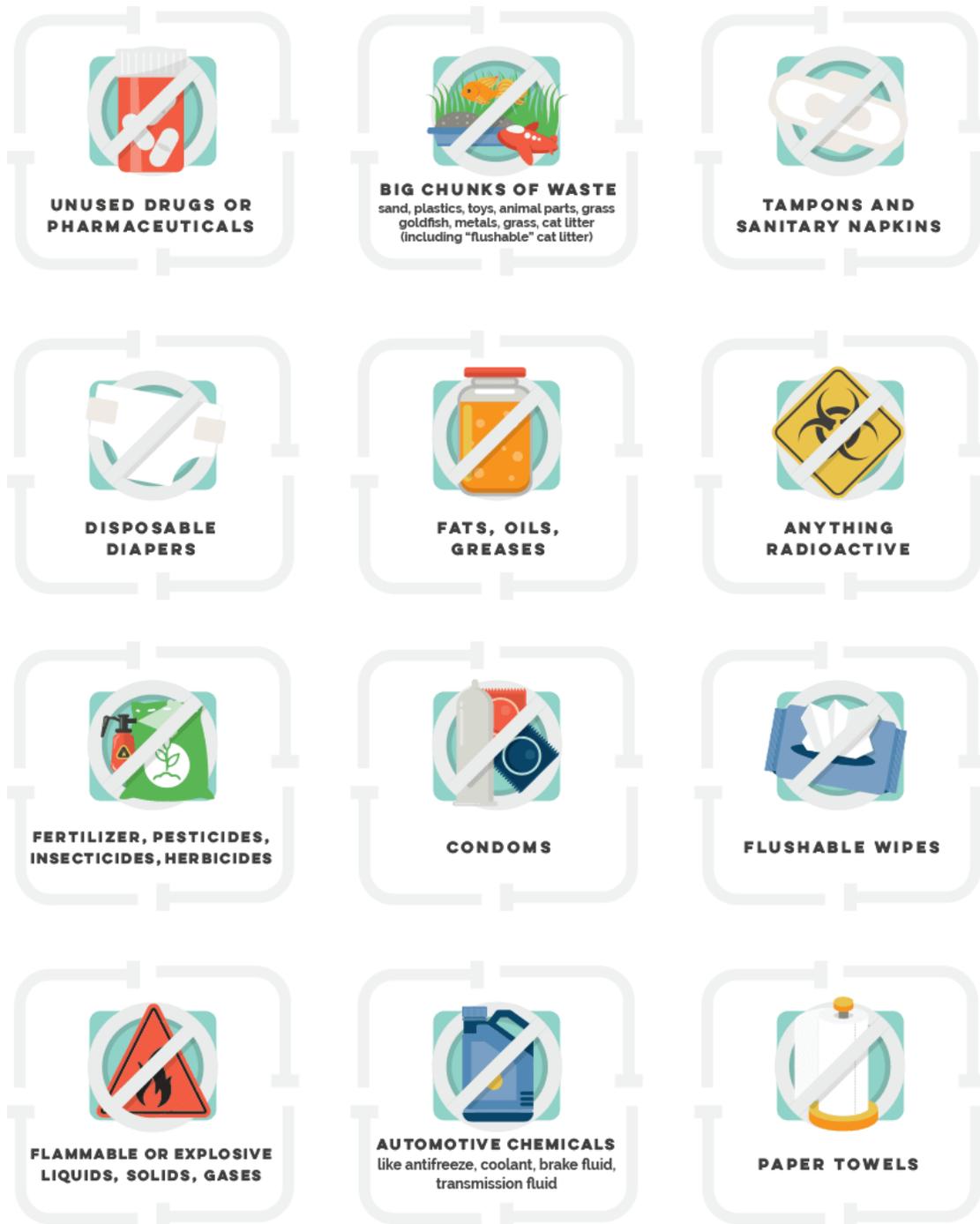
“ People try to discharge their oil and grease properly, but over time, you can get a fair amount of oil and grease from washing pots, pans and dishware. The cumulative impact could be substantial. It's that long-term consistent discharge of that oil and grease, even if it's a small amount at a time, which could lead to problems. ”

THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER FLUSH

Having to call a plumber to take a look at your toilet or drain because they have been clogged can be embarrassing and quite a hassle. Even though it may seem like common sense what can and can't be flushed and put down the drain, this is a topic that is often overlooked or taken for granted. With that said, this guide will first discuss what you can and can't flush down the toilet, followed by what you can and can't put down the drain.

This is quite simple, actually. The only three things that really should ever be flushed down the toilet is urine, fecal matter, and toilet paper. It definitely isn't rocket science, but yet people flush plenty of other things that they think they can get away with all the time! Items like Kleenex, paper towels, and tissue paper, for example, should not ever be flushed. They may seem like they're in the same family as toilet paper, but they take a lot longer to break down in the sewer system, thus, causing sewage blockages.

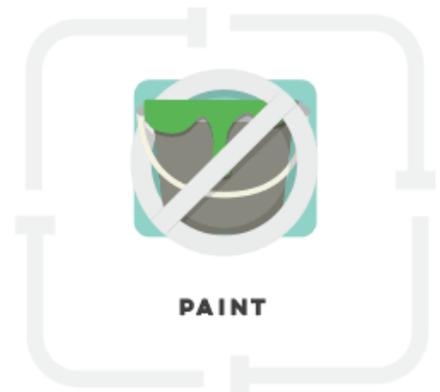
Some other things that you may be tempted to flush but shouldn't include:



THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER PUT DOWN THE DRAIN

It can be tempting to just spin everything down the drain after cooking, especially when a big pile of plates and pieces of food accumulate. However, what we pour down the drain can cause issues in the long run for our household pipes and septic systems. In turn, this would be of detriment to water ecosystems and their inhabitants too. While water treatment facilities work hard to remove contaminants a lot of these chemicals and substances still end up in the oceans, rivers, and lakes.

Want to make [your life at home](#) easier in the long run, while helping the environment? Here are some things you should be mindful of, and keep them out of the drain.



COST TO FIX A BLOCKAGE AT HOME DUE TO IMPROPER FLUSHING

Flushing things down the drain at home can lead to costly repairs. Things like dental floss and flushable wipes that are mistakenly thought to be safe for flushing, can lead to failure in the sewage pump. Replacing the sewage pump can cost around \$500 on average. Unclogging pipes within the house can cost up to \$200.

The real money drainer would be if the main sewer line were to get blocked, causing sewage to come back up into the house. The cost to fix this issue can be anywhere from \$1,000 up to \$7,000. Not only is the cost high, but can result in a noxious smell like rotten eggs coming from the drain openings.

Pouring household chemicals down the drain can also lead to corrosion of your pipes. Over a period of time, such chemicals could lead to weakening the main sewage line, which we already showed to be a very nasty, and costly, repair.

COST TO THE PUBLIC WATERWORKS

What you put down the kitchen drain and the toilet may seem like an ‘out of sight out of mind’ scenario, but it is not at all. If your pipes don’t get clogged up causing costly repairs immediately to you, then there is still the public waterworks systems that could be severely damaged from things that should not be there.

One prime example are [flushable wipes](#). There are reports all over the country of costly efforts to remove gigantic lumps that weigh tons, because the wipes don’t break apart and can combine with congealed food that form into massive lumps. Costs to remove these flushable wipe blockages can get up to \$500,000. Worldwide, the maintenance cost is estimated to be in the billions. A sewage company also reported that two thirds of their blockages are caused by wet wipes.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF NON-CHEMICAL ITEMS

Environmentally speaking, flushing down wet wipes is detrimental to the environment because they are actually made with synthetic fibers, which are plastics. If wet wipes make it all the way out to the ocean, they'll end up as micro-plastics, and cluster with other micro-plastics, which add to vastly growing problem of garbage swirling in the oceans and ending up in the digestive systems of sea life.

Dental floss is another common item flushed down the toilet that should not be. It does not biodegrade, and aids in blocking sewage lines, and can also end up in the ocean where sea life can choke on it.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CHEMICALS IN HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Chemically speaking, there are a few common cleaning chemicals that are often found in waterways. Nitrogen is often found in glass, surface, and floor cleaners. Ammonia is in many cleaning products as well, from sanitizers, degreasers, and getting rid of allergens. Phosphorus is up to 40% of all dishwasher detergents.

All of these chemicals are not removed by water treatment processes, and end up in the water ways. These chemicals cause some plant life to grow unnaturally fast, causing a type of damming effect and clogging up natural waterways so that wildlife cannot survive there any longer. On top of all this, all of these [plants die off together in huge amounts](#), then decay, and deplete the oxygen in the water. Algae begins to grow shortly thereafter, which further takes up the oxygen in the water, leading to the fish and other wildlife to die off, continuing the cycle of decay. Ultimately, the water that was once part of an ecosystem and safe to drink, has become unsafe for even bathing.

LABELS CAN BE MISLEADING

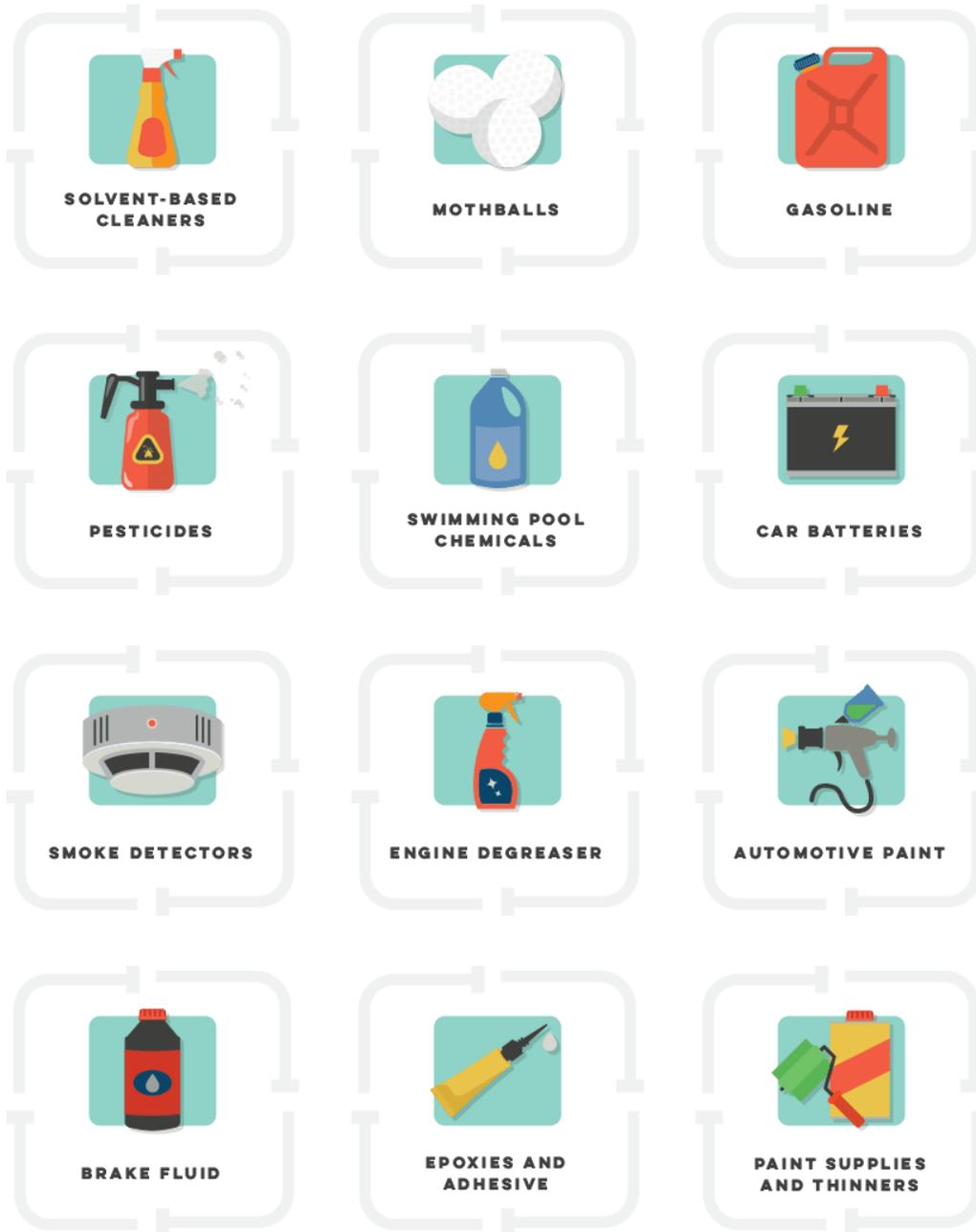
The wet wipes you buy may say they are “flushable”, but that is [proving to be far from the truth](#). Wet wipes go through seven tests to be sure they can go through the sewer lines and properly biodegrade. These tests, however, were created by the trade organization that creates and sells the wet wipes, rather than by the public waterworks agencies and sewerage companies that actually deal with the aftermath of wet wipes. The tests claim the wet wipes disintegrate, but that is after 3 hours of sloshing back and forth, when in the real world the wet wipes would reach the sewerage lines within a few minutes. Here they will get stuck and cause a blockage, as there is no agitation at that point to break them down.

The tests are also done in ideal conditions, where in the real world most sewer systems are built to process just toilet paper and human waste, not tons of much thicker, woven wet wipes.

HOW TO PROPERLY DISPOSE OF HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

There are some household chemicals that can be flushed down the drain with lots of water, but only if the chemical will be rendered harmless with water and if the sewage system of your town can remove the toxins. You'll want to contact your local water treatment plant to find out which chemicals can go down the drain safely.

For everything else, you'll want to save them in gallon jugs and old bottles from drinks. Most communities have collection days, where you can bring all your hazardous wastes to a designated drop off point, and the city will safely and professionally dispose of the waste, or recycle it when possible. Some things that should be saved for collection days are the following:



HOW TO DISPOSE OF UNUSED AND EXPIRED MEDICATIONS

An often overlooked item that should never be flushed down the toilet, is medications. Pills that have expired, or are no longer needed, are often put down the drain. These same pills and what is contained within them,

have ended up in the drinking water of towns across the country. Seek out [local organizations](#) that collect expired and unused pills, to then dispose of them safely and professionally. You can also mix the pills with coffee grounds, kitty litter, or something else that'd keep them from being eaten by animals sifting through trash.

HOW TO DISPOSE OF KITCHEN WASTE - GREASE AND OILS

Instead of pouring the grease and oils from your cooking down the drain, you can compost it for your home garden. Although too much grease can lead to a very low quality compost as it can block oxygen from breaking down the compost properly and lead to being very smelly. A lot of grease in your compost pile can also attract animals. Another option is to find local programs where you can take your kitchen waste to for recycling, as grease and oil from the kitchen can be converted into a biofuel. The easiest option, finally, is to [pour the grease and oils into sealable containers](#) like an old coffee container or milk jug and throw it all out with your regular garbage.

WAYS TO REDUCE USAGE OF DESTRUCTIVE ITEMS

There are several items that aren't necessary or easily replaceable in a household, that can end up causing damage to your plumbing, the municipal water treatment plant, and the environment. Below are ways to reduce usage of various items that cause problems when put down the drain.



As for paper based products, there are lots of things that can be done that are better for your household and more. If you prefer using flushable wipes, try reducing the amount you use, or consider installing a bidet. Hopefully you're not putting paper towels from cleaning up messes down the drain, but if you are, be sure to use the trash can instead. Or you can put them into your compost pile. Using rags and towels and other reusable products is also a great way to reduce overall usage of disposable paper towels.



When buying household cleaning supplies, compare which chemicals are used and which are less toxic, or can be treated by your water treatment plant as to not cause harm to the environment. There are many cleaners that are very effective and made with enzymes, oxygen, and citrus, which are all very eco-friendly. Also, instead of using chemicals to open up a clogged drain, try using a metal snake instead.

BOTTOM LINE - FLUSH ONLY THE THREE P'S

What it all comes down to, is to keep what goes down the drain to the three P's - pee, poop, and toilet paper.

Anything else will eventually do damage to your property's plumbing, the city's waterworks, and the environment. It's best to be mindful of this, and to take the extra bit of time to properly dispose of hazardous chemicals and kitchen wastes. It's also important to not readily believe all the labels you see about products being flushable as that term is very loosely used. Happy flushing!



RESOURCES

We've compiled more informative resources below if you are looking to research more in depth on the above topics.



[What To Flush](#)

This site is dedicated to informing the general public on what can go down the drains safely, and what cannot.



[Flushable Wipes](#)

Flushable wipes are a hot topic among sewage companies and toiletry companies. This article goes more in depth about the growing concern over the current state of flushable wipes.



[Disposing Old Medications](#)

This article gives details on how to properly dispose of unused medications, and advancements to make pills more environmentally friendly.



[FDA Guide to Safe Disposal of Medicines](#)

The FDA has compiled a fantastic list of medicines that can be disposed of through flushing, and also lists the active ingredient of the medicine.



[Biotechnology Advances in Wastewater Treatment](#)

This research paper goes over the effects of plants and microorganisms in the treatment of wastewater.



[Overview On Drains, Wells, and Septic Systems](#)

The FDA has created a lesson plan for those wanting to learn about how drains, wells, and septic systems work, and how to properly maintain them.



[USDA Guide to Grease Disposal](#)

At the bottom of this article you'll find the recommendations set forth by the USDA on how to properly dispose of grease and other kitchen waste.



[How Plumbing Works](#)

It can be useful to understand the principles of plumbing to help you realize the importance of not flushing certain things down the drain.



[How Sewer Systems Work](#)

This is an excellent guide to the mechanisms behind wastewater treatment.

