



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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DEM URGES RHODE ISLANDERS TO DISPOSE OF DISINFECTANT WIPES IN THE TRASH TO HELP AVOID SEWER BACKUPS

Flushing cleaning wipes causes clogs and can lead to overflows in wastewater collection systems

PROVIDENCE – The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is urging all Rhode Islanders to refrain from flushing disinfectant wipes – including those labeled “flushable” – and instead, to dispose of them in the trash. This morning, the Burrillville Sewer Commission alerted DEM that equipment at the Burrillville Wastewater Treatment Facility and its pump stations have been getting clogged as a result of wipes being flushed down the toilet. Staff from the treatment facility have also been called out after-hours to clear clogged pipes at pump stations to avert sewage overflows. In addition to Burrillville, other local communities have also raised this concern.

Whether your home or business is connected to the public sewer system or has an onsite wastewater treatment system, you should never flush any type of wipes, including baby wipes and those labeled flushable, down the toilet. Instead, you should place these products in the trash for proper disposal.

In addition to causing clogs and wastewater collection system overflows, flushing wipes can also lead to sewer back-ups in basements and damage wastewater treatment equipment. Although some of these products may be labeled as flushable, most wipes do not break down in sewer lines and pumping stations as toilet paper does. As we are seeing in Burrillville, they can clog our sewer systems and cause pump station failures. During a time when we’re washing our hands and wiping down surfaces more frequently, Rhode Island’s wastewater treatment facilities are being affected by the disposal of wipes into sewage systems. We can all do our part and help avoid sewer overflows by disposing of these wipes in the trash rather than flushing them away.

For more information about items that should not be flushed, visit the Water Environment Federation website at <https://www.wef.org/resources/for-the-public/public-information/fact-sheets/> and click on "It's a Toilet, Not a Trash Can!" in the left-hand menu.

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