

Sewer savers

Evansville asks residents to not use flushable wipes

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EVANSVILLE

The sewer workers of the world would like you to do them a favor.

Keep your bathroom experience as traditional as possible.

In August, the Evansville Public Works Department launched a "No Wipes Down the Pipes" campaign to keep those moist towelettes referred to as "flushable wipes" out of the sewer system.

Here's the problem: Yes, the wipes are flushable. They will disappear when you hold down the handle—as will action heroes, golf balls and paper towels.

Should any of those items be flushed? Absolutely not, said Allen Reynolds, foreman for the Evansville Public Works Department.

Moist wipes, baby wipes, Kleenex, paper towels, cleaning wipes—basically anything that is not human waste or toilet paper should not ever, ever be flushed.

Here's what happens: Once in the pipes, the wipes clog things up, get stuck to sensors or hung up on screens. Even worse, the wipes seem to have some kind of attraction to each other and end up forming long ropes that have to be fished out by hand.

The sewer people even have a word for it: ragging.

The Michigan State Extension explained it best: "Ragging," refers to the phenomenon in which flushable wipes for adults and toddlers combine with other items such as extra-thick toilet paper, baby wipes, paper towels, sanitary pads, dental floss...get tangled up in sewer pipes."

And that, right there, is the most disgusting sentence ever written.

Reynolds was inspired to start the Evansville campaign after hearing Marshfield Wastewater Utility Superintendent Sam Warp Jr. talk about what happened in his

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city.

"At one of his pump stations, his guys were in there pulling off 20-pound clumps of these things twice a day," Reynolds said.

Reynolds said he could probably find photos of the clump wipes if we wanted to see them.

No, thank you.

Wipes have been heavily marketed as a way to help you improve your bathroom experience or "Enjoy the Go." That's Charmin's verbiage. Charmin also encourages people to "pair" their toilet paper with

moist wipes.

Sort of like pairing wine and cheese, but with more expensive results.

In 2013, Marshfield spent \$550,000 to replace equipment and upgrade pumps at one of its stations. This year, the city will spend another \$1.45 million to upgrade other lift station.

"That's \$2 million spent to improve the collection system and handle disposable wipes," Warp wrote on the city's website. "This money could have been spent dealing with other issues we face."

In Washington, D.C., the sanitary system spent more

than \$1 million on grinders to shred wipes and other stuff that shouldn't be flushed.

It's not just a city's infrastructure that suffers.

"When people have tree roots growing in their laterals, those wipes will clog them up a lot faster," Reynolds said.

Ever cleaned up a sewage backup in your basement? There's not a "cleaning wipe" in the world that will make it easier.

"No wipes down the pipes will also save homeowners money, and they won't have to worry about backup into the house," Reynolds said.

So why do those wipes say

they are flushable or "safe for sewer and septic systems?"

Michigan State Extension explained: "...Utilities believe manufacturers of flushable products are not conducting disintegration tests for flushable wipes that mimic actual conditions in real-life sewer systems."

So what items are "flushable" in every sense of the word?

Only two items: Human waste and toilet paper.

With the exception of the occasional—and accidental—action figure, that should be all that goes down the pipes.