

Wipes Clog Pipes

The filter screen seen below is covered in “ragging” – scores of disposable wipes and other products that have been flushed down the toilet. This pump, part of the bypass system at the 15 Mile Road Sewer Collapse worksite, loses capacity as wipes clog the screens around the pump or bind up the pump’s motor. Every time this needs to be cleaned—as often as every two hours during a rain—it costs about \$500 in manpower and equipment expenses—expenses eventually passed on to sewer rate payers in the Macomb Interceptor Drainage District.

Ironically, the very quality that makes wipes so attractive from a use standpoint—their ability to hold together when wet—is what causes problems in a sewer system. Whereas toilet paper is designed to biodegrade in water, wipes are specifically designed to hold together.

Many wipes and similar products are labeled as “flushable.” While they may be flushable, they ARE NOT biodegradable. Wipes should be disposed of in a trash can.

The Macomb County Office of Public Works, in conjunction with your local municipal department of public works and the Great Lakes Water Authority, uses a variety of screens and filters in an attempt to limit the damage these wipes can cause to our system. Of course, no screening system is as good as catching the problem at the source—eliminating the wipes from entering the system in the first place. Use the wipes, just be sure they end up in the trash after use. Remember, wipes clog pipes!

Never Flush:

- Personal and baby wipes
- Tampons and sanitary products
- Condoms
- Facial tissues
- Paper towels
- Cleaning wipes and rags
- Dental floss
- Cat litter
- Prescription drugs
- Cotton balls and swabs
- Over the counter or prescription medicines
- Cigarette butts

