

How to be a responsible flusher

Flushing the wrong items down the toilet can be costly in many ways. They damage wastewater treatment equipment and cause sewage overflow through manholes and on streets, all of which is an avoidable expense for the cities. And frankly, flushing the wrong items can create a gross mess for treatment plant workers.

Most of what is being flushed cannot be processed by wastewater systems. Cities depend on gravity to carry the wastewater from your home through a series of pipes and into the cities' treatment plants. Where gravity does not work, motorized pumps give the system a boost. Clots often make it through the well-cleaned pipes but can jam the pumps inside the lift stations and at wastewater treatment plants. These clots can burn out expensive motors and plug industrial screens. Public workers must then re-route or temporarily stop the flow while they clean up and repair the damage.



So, what can be flushed? The list is short and straightforward – do not flush anything but human waste and toilet paper. It's important to remember that the toilet is not a trash can, and things such as wipes, paper towels, facial tissue, diapers, feminine hygiene products, cotton swabs, cotton balls, band-aids, dental floss, condoms, and even kitty litter should never be flushed. They do not break down like toilet paper, cause clogs, and get tangled with everything else fighting to get through the pipes, causing back-ups.

What is the main culprit that causes problems for your city's wastewater treatment plant? Wipes of any kind, even if they are labeled flushable. Wipes are not immediately biodegradable and create issues for treatment plant workers. Regardless of what the packaging may say, please do NOT flush any type of wipes. Instead, simply dispose of them in the trash.

Additionally, prescription and over-the-counter medications must be disposed of safely and never flushed. While watching them disappear down the toilet might seem like a safe way to dispose of drugs, it is not. Please [dispose of all medications properly](#) to ensure our recycled water remains safe and reliable. Additionally, many cities have convenient disposal locations, so visit your city's website for more information.

Other chemicals, such as unwanted household cleansers, topical solutions, and disinfectants, can also harm and should not be poured down the toilet. Proper disposal of these also helps protect your health and the environment.

Recycled water is an essential part of municipal providers' water portfolios. It will play an increasingly important role moving forward as they look for safe, locally controlled, and drought-proof options to bolster their water supplies. Innovative technology allows the water used in our homes to be screened, treated, and reused, which is currently used to irrigate landscaping and fill underground aquifers for use in times of water shortages. The [Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station](#) is also cooled with recycled water supplied by five AMWUA cities, which collectively own the [91st Ave Wastewater Treatment Plant](#), the largest of its kind in the entire Southwest region.

The key takeaway is that cities need to keep reclaiming wastewater at the lowest cost possible, and it requires your help. That's why cities ask residents and businesses to be mindful of what is flushed. So, please remember that your toilet is not a trash can, and for the health of our cities, let's all flush responsibly.

For over 50 years, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has helped protect our member cities' ability to provide their communities with assured, safe, and sustainable water supplies. For more information, visit www.amwua.org.