

Disposable wipes are costing sewage systems millions of dollars

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Several class-action lawsuits filed recently against the makers of flushable wet-wipes have brought to light a serious—and unsavory—problem: The popular cleaning products might be clogging sewer systems. But whether the manufacturers should be held accountable is still up in the air, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

Jessica Morrison, assistant editor at C&EN, reports that New York City alone claims to have spent more than \$18 million over six years clearing wipes from its wastewater treatment facilities. Last month, the city of Wyoming, Minnesota, filed suit against the manufacturers of these products. It is seeking \$5 million in damages and a declaration from the court that the wipes should not go down the drain. In at least four additional class-action lawsuits, consumers are claiming the products have damaged household plumbing, sewers and septic systems.

But whether flushable wipes are to blame for jamming water treatment machinery is not clear. Manufacturers say the non-flushable kind and other items such as paper towels and feminine products are causing the problems. Also, the term "flushable" itself has no regulatory definition, which leaves it open to interpretation. While the courts deliberate on the issues, wastewater managers continue to deal with blockages, turning to public education campaigns and installing \$30,000 wipe "grinders."

More information: To Flush or Not to Flush,

cen.acs.org/articles/93/i19/We...g-Sewer-Systems.html

Provided by American Chemical Society

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