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“Trash it. Don’t Flush It.” Public Awareness Campaign Encourages New Yorkers to Properly Dispose of Waste



Accumulation of Grease and Debris Causes 84 Percent of Sewer Backups in New York City; Damaging Equipment, Costing Millions of Dollars and Threatening Public Health and the Environment

Photos are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) this week launched the “Trash It. Don’t Flush It.” public awareness campaign to spread the message that improperly disposing of grease, wipes and other trash can clog pipes, lead to sewer backups and cause flooding and costly damage. Ads reminding New Yorkers to properly dispose of their trash are now being featured around the city at select subway stations, bus shelters, and on trains, buses, television, and on social media. The campaign will run for the next four weeks and aims to reduce sewer backups and costly damage to private plumbing and the City’s wastewater system.

The campaign’s new website fatbergfree.nyc includes a “Trash It. Don’t Flush It.” flyer that can be downloaded for free by businesses, building owners, and property managers who experience clogs in their internal plumbing. DEP is also partnering with City Agencies to post the flyer in public restrooms. DEP spends nearly \$19 million annually to clean clogged sewers, dispose of wipes and repair damaged machinery. It can cost a property owner more than \$10,000 to repair household plumbing damaged by grease and wipes.

“New York City, with 8.6 million residents, could not exist without an effective wastewater treatment system and improperly disposed of wipes, grease and other debris impedes the ability of our system to properly do its job and protect public

More Information

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health,” said **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. “This campaign will help to raise awareness of this important issue and remind New Yorkers to dispose of trash where it belongs—in a trash can.”

“With an aging, overburdened sewer system, we must be vigilant about what we send down the drain,” said **Council Member Costa Constantinides, Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection**. “It’s important we let New Yorkers know the ramifications of sending wipes, oils, and other harmful materials through our beleaguered pipes.”



New Yorkers produce approximately 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater every day of the year. Powered by the force of gravity, the wastewater travels downhill through the 7,500-mile sewer system to one of 14 wastewater resource recovery facilities located across the five boroughs. While toilet paper is manufactured in a way that allows it to break down almost immediately in the sewer system, wipes, even those labeled as flushable, are much stronger and do not break down. The growth in the sales of wipes over the last several years correlates with an increasing number of blockages, damage to equipment, landfill trips, flooding and other related costs to New Yorkers.

Grease that is improperly poured down the drain is similarly causing blockages in the sewer system. In fact, it is the number one cause of sewer backups in New York City. Other items that are often improperly flushed down the toilet include feminine products, make-up applicators, condoms and cat litter. Over time, the grease and improperly flushed items build up within the sewers causing “fatbergs.” The word fatberg combines the word “fat” and “iceberg” to describe large masses that clog sewers and impair operations. The problem of fatbergs, is affecting municipalities across the country and around the world, including London, where a 210-foot long, 130-ton fatberg was blocking a sewer.

What can New Yorkers do to help prevent fatbergs?

- ONLY flush the four P’s: Pee, Poop, Puke and toilet Paper.
- NEVER flush wipes or other trash down the toilet, even if the box is labeled as flushable.
- NEVER pour grease down kitchen sinks or toilets. Instead, place grease in sealed non-recyclable containers and discard with regular garbage.

- TOSS dirty baby, makeup and cleaning wipes, tampons, sanitary pads and condoms in the trash.
- REDUCE AND REUSE by using compostable or reusable makeup applicators (such as cotton balls) and cleaning supplies (such as paper towels or rags).
- RECYCLE finished toilet rolls, cardboard packaging from toothpaste and brushes, and plastic packaging from shampoos and shower gels.

What is New York City doing to prevent sewer backups?

New York City’s sewer system is divided into 160,000 sewer segments that run between two adjacent manholes. DEP has been tracking segments with recurring sewer backups and has been proactively cleaning miles of sewers. DEP also enforces the City regulation that requires food service establishments to use a grease trap to help keep grease out of the sewer system. In addition, DEP has conducted door-to-door outreach, hosted regular meetings with community boards, churches, civic associations and New York City Housing Authority residents that has resulted in contact with more than 90,000 households. Additionally, proper waste disposal has been incorporated into DEP’s regular educational materials for New York City students.

DEP manages New York City’s water supply, providing approximately 1 billion gallons of high quality drinking water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8.6 million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$19.4 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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