



Media Release

COVID-19 and Sewers – To avoid a Sewage Back-up don't treat your toilet like trash can

Canadian municipalities urge their residents to think about what they flush

(Ottawa, March 20, 2020) There is never a good time for a toilet to back-up in your home, or the sewer line for your apartment building, or your whole street. “But now, at a time when we are being quarantined or self-isolated at home due to COVID-19, nobody wants a situation that would force you out of your home where you are safest”, observed Robert Haller, Executive Director of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA).

Canadian municipal leaders and wastewater professionals are urging everyone to NOT flush anything but the 3P's - pee, poop and paper (toilet paper).

The CWWA knows there has been a rush on toilet paper and that some people may need to consider alternative products. Yes, there are many alternatives, but they CANNOT BE FLUSHED.

Our municipal sewer systems are built to handle human waste and toilet paper that is specifically designed to deteriorate quickly. Anything else put down your toilet or sink causes problems that lead to clogs, blockages and wastewater equipment damage. Any of these situations can shut down sewer systems.

Fats, oils and grease (FOG) poured down the sink, congeal and line the sewer walls, then 'so-called flushable' wipes, paper towels and hygiene products collect together with the grease to form clogs. This can block your toilet, your home sewer line, or form “fatbergs” constricting the sewers of entire neighbourhoods. These clogs can also result in overflows of raw sewage into local rivers and lakes.

Raw sewage can back-up into your home and your neighbours' homes – likely requiring you to evacuate your house for professional cleaning. Large blockages often require municipal staff to clear them, at a time when our efforts and tax dollars need to be focused on critical services.

The CWWA has been sharing the 3P's message for years, but it has never been more important than now. Canadian municipalities are seeing a very significant upward spike in the number of clogs attributable to increased use of 'alternative' products such as toilet wipes, paper towels and even tissues (that do not break down like toilet paper).

"To be clear, it doesn't matter if the manufacturer claims on the package label it is 'flushable', it is not. We have also seen the increased flushing of cleaning wipes and rubber gloves in recent weeks said Mr. Haller." (see attached images)

"We urge homeowners to remember that toilets are not trash cans", stated Barry Orr, Sewer Outreach and Control Inspector for the City of London. Barry is also the Canadian spokesman for the Municipal Enforcement Sewer Use Group as well as a researcher at Ryerson University testing the 'flushability' of products.

So we, your local water and wastewater professionals, urge Canadians to resist flushing anything down their toilets except the 3P's (pee, poop and toilet paper) – especially during this time of increased public health concern.



These are pictures taken March 17th 2020 from a sewage pumping station in London, Ontario. Images can be reproduced with credit to Barry Orr and CWWA

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CWWA has professional members across Canada available for media interviews

The Canadian Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) is the national association representing Canada's municipal water and wastewater professionals and the private sector partners that support them. CWWA was founded in 1986 to facilitate knowledge sharing and to represent this sector at a national level. The association is recognized as THE national voice of this public service sector and focuses its activities and communications on significant national issues, trends and events.