

Wet Wipe Fact File



The problem

Wet wipes and other 'unflushable' items find their way to our seas when they're flushed down the toilet.

In 2024, almost 26,500 wet wipes were found on beaches cleaned and surveyed by Marine Conservation Society volunteers. Sewage-related litter items were found on 74% of our cleans - the same levels as 2023 - so we know these items still pose a problem to our ocean. (1)

Plastic pollution

Some wet wipes contain plastic fibres, meaning they won't break down in the same way as toilet paper.

These plastic wet wipes can collect toxic chemicals and bacteria on their journey through our sewerage system, and when they eventually start to break up, they become microplastics. This process unfortunately makes them more easily ingested by marine animals.

UK governments finally announced a **ban on plastic in single-use wet wipes in April 2024**, which marks a major milestone in tackling plastic pollution in our seas.



1. Marine Conservation Society 2020

Wet Wipe Fact File

Saturated sewers

In sewers, wet wipes can combine with fat, grease and oil to form giant fatbergs. However, only 5% is actual fat – over 90% is wet wipes! (2) One of the biggest fatbergs found in London was longer than Tower Bridge and as heavy as 11 double-decker buses. (3) Fatbergs cost the UK a staggering £90 million per year to remove. (4)



Whitechapel fatberg sample
at the Museum of London
Credit: Seeing Sanitation



An overflow pipe on the beach
Credit: MCS/Kate Wilson

Wet wipes can reach the ocean from sewerage systems in several ways:

- Fatbergs create blockages in our sewers and can cause untreated wastewater to overflow into our streams, rivers and ocean
- Some wet wipes can pass through sewage treatment works to end up on our beaches
- Drains can overflow after heavy rain when the system cannot cope with the volume of water
- Between 15,000 and 500,000 homes in the UK are thought to have drain misconnections. (5) A misconnection is when household drains are pumped into the wrong external drain. Sewage water that should be transported to wastewater treatment plants, is instead drained into rivers.

2 & 3. BBC 2017

4. Grease Guardian 2017

5. The Rivers Trust 2019

Wet Wipe Fact File



The solution

- Don't put oil down the sink after cooking, as this helps create fatbergs! Wait for the pan to cool, wipe the oil off with a tissue, and dispose of in the bin instead.
- We've worked with industries to remove plastics from wet wipes labelled 'flushable,' and to ensure clear 'do not flush' labelling on all wet wipes unless they pass the Fine to Flush standard.
- Helping consumers understand the problem by raising awareness can help to reduce the number of wet wipes being flushed down toilets. Check out the video of [Wallace the wet wipe monster](#) used around the country to highlight the problem.
- Searching for brands that don't use plastic in their products helps consumers make more responsible choices.
- It can be confusing to know which wet wipes are fine to flush. If you're unsure, then pop it in the bin instead and only flush the 3 Ps (pee, poo, and paper) down the toilet!



A wet wipe in sand
Credit: Natasha Ewins



Fine to Flush logo
Credit: Water UK