

The Guardian



Wet wipes make up 93% of matter causing UK sewer blockages

City to Sea campaign says we must rethink bad habits and only flush ‘three Ps: pee, paper and poo’ as study finds blockages cost UK £100m a year

Matthew Taylor

Tue 12 Dec 2017 02.15 EST

Baby wipes are causing hundreds of thousands of blockages in the UK sewer system and costing the country £100m every year, according to a new report.

The study from Water UK, the trade body representing all of the main water and sewerage companies in the country, found that wipes made up about 93% of the material causing the sewer blockages.

Water UK’s director of corporate affairs, Rae Stewart, said the findings proved that sewer blockages that cost £100m a year are “a problem we can all do something about”.

“There are things that water companies can do, such as improve education about what should and shouldn’t be flushed. There are things manufacturers can do, such as make labelling clearer

on non-flushable products. And, of course, there are things individuals can do - which is bin the wipes rather than flush them.”

The report said there are approximately 300,000 sewer blockages every year, costing the country £100m - money which Water UK says could be taken off bills or spent on improving services.

Earlier this year a fatberg weighing the same as 11 double decker buses and stretching the length of two football pitches was found blocking a section of the sewer system in east London.

Natalie Fee, from the plastic pollution campaign group City to Sea which has been running a campaign about not flushing wipes and other single-use plastic down the toilet, said people should rethink their flushing habits and only flush “the three Ps: pee, paper and poo”.

Fee also called on manufacturers to do more to label wipes properly. “Most people still don’t know that baby wipes contain plastic, and they would be a lot less likely to flush them if it was listed as an ingredient on the pack.”

Since you’re here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven’t put up a paywall - we want to keep our journalism as open as we can. So you can see why we need to ask for your help. The Guardian’s independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we do it because we believe our perspective matters - because it might well be your perspective, too.

I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I’m happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information. Thomasine, Sweden

If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps fund it, our future would be much more secure. **For as little as \$1, you can support the Guardian - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Waste
- Water
- Plastics
- news