

TO FLUSH OR NOT TO FLUSH...

The City of Winslow has received numerous calls over the years regarding sewers backing up into homes and businesses.

This brochure is meant to be a guideline for residents regarding the role they play in preventing this occurrence.

For many people, once something has gone down the toilet, it's out of sight and out of mind. It's just something we don't think about until the sewer backs up into our homes.



And of course many product manufacturers label products “Flushable,” that have devastating and costly effects on the sewer collection system, and the Wastewater Treatment Facility. Flushable labels on anything cannot be assumed as harmless if flushed, just because it fits down the toilet.

What causes sewers to back up?

Sewer backups are caused when your service line to the main or the main sewer line, gets clogged with items other than toilet paper that get caught in the line, build up, and plug.

Why should I care if the sewer backs up?

Sewage backups are very costly, messy, stinky, and pose a serious threat to the health and safety of people, animals, and the environment. Infectious diseases can be transmitted from raw sewage resulting in serious illnesses or even death.

What **CAN** I flush down the toilet?

Only feces, urine, and toilet paper should be flushed down the toilet. Other drains should only be used to dispose of used water and soaps from washing or cleaning activities.

What CAN'T I flush down the toilet?

Personal Care Products	Household Trash
Flushable wipes	Cat litter
Disinfectant wipes	Fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, insecticides
Moist bathroom wipes	Corrosive substances, acidic or caustic
Feminine hygiene products, tampons, pads	Poisons and hazardous waste
Facial tissue	Anti-freeze, oil, transmission fluids
Disposable diapers	Flammable or explosive liquids, solids, or gases
Dental floss, gum picks	Chemicals and solvents
Cotton balls and swabs	Cigarette butts
Condoms and wrappers	Coffee grounds
Band-aids, bandages, and wrappers	Disposable mop heads and duster heads
Used soap bars	Fats, cooking oil, and grease
Paper towels	Paint, stains, thinners
Hypodermic needles and medications	"Flushable" Toilet bowl scrub pads
Vitamins and supplements	Grass clippings
Hair, Hair nets	Goldfish or unused bait
Nail clippings	Toys
Unused prescriptions	Left-over food

Why can't I flush these thing down the toilet or drains?

The above types of materials can cause clogs in the sewer lines or damage the collection system, or very expensive equipment at the treatment facility. They may also pose safety threats to citizens and sewer workers. Some of the prohibited substances are not readily removed in the sewage treatment process, and therefore pose a threat to water quality when discharged with the facilities effluent. ("Effluent" means the treated water from a sewage treatment facility that is discharged into our lakes, streams, rivers, or groundwater.)

Why should I care what happens to the sewage treatment facility?

The sewage treatment facility is publicly owned, which means we all pay for these associated costs. Proper sewage treatment is vital in protecting everyone from water borne diseases and protecting the environment from pollution. This important job is not cheap! We all pay for it! By following the above guidelines we all contribute to protecting our community's investment and keeping costs as low as possible. Clogs in the city sewer lines costs money to be cleared, and broken equipment in the treatment facility from foreign objects creates expensive repairs. This cost is passed on to everyone in the form of higher taxes and/or higher user fees.

What happens if I don't follow the guidelines?

The city's public works department proactively televises a portion of the city sewer lines every year. The high tech televising equipment not only allows us to inspect, record, and document the condition of the city collection system, it also allows us to inspect a portion of the service connections from residences and businesses, giving us a clear recorded video of what may be in your line.

Regardless of what's on labeled products; Violations of city code concerning prohibited materials in the sewage collection system could lead to prosecution, fines, and conviction of a misdemeanor.

Home flushability test

Fill two bowls with water, place a sheet of toilet paper in one bowl, and place any of the above items (Kleenex, tampon, flushable wipes, etc..) in the other bowl. Swish both items around in the water, wait an hour, and then swish again.

The toilet paper should have significantly degraded by then, while the other item will likely remain intact. Unless the item disintegrates at the rate of toilet paper, it should be thrown in the garbage, not in the toilet or down a drain.

Most people give very little thought to wastewater once it has left their home, office, shop, or factory. With a little more care and thought about how we dispose of our waste, we can greatly improve the effectiveness of treatment, and reduce the costs for repairs of pumps and treatment equipment of our sewer system.

We hope this guideline helps everyone prevent sewage backups and costly equipment repair. Please feel free to call our office if you have any further questions or concerns.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

Cory Franek

Assistant Public Works Director
City of Winslow

