

MPCA Proposal on Flushable Wipes



MPCA Proposal Would Prohibit Labeling Disposable Wipes as 'Flushable'

This League-supported measure could reduce operation and maintenance costs for municipalities across the state. (*Published Feb 22, 2016*)

Although often labeled as “flushable,” disposable wipes (used for changing diapers, personal hygiene, housecleaning, and more) cause major problems—for homeowners and cities—when flushed down toilets. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is working with legislators to introduce legislation that would ban the use of the word “flushable” on these products’ labels.

What’s the problem?

These so-called “flushable” wipes don’t break down the way toilet paper does. They clog homeowner and municipal sewer pipes, put stress on community wastewater collection and treatment equipment, and cause cities to spend thousands of dollars on premature equipment repair and replacement.

Wipes snag on any imperfection in sewer pipes, catch passing debris and grease, and create a “ball” that will grow to plug the pipe. Cities must manually clean screens or remove clogs.

Bill to be introduced this session

The MPCA bill, which will be introduced in the 2016 legislative session, is supported by long-standing League policy. Gov. Dayton’s recent attention to water quality also brings renewed attention to this issue. Cities have frequently raised concerns about the problem of flushed wipes. In fact, Sauk Centre, Cold Spring, Princeton, Wyoming, and several other Minnesota cities are involved in a class-action lawsuit against companies that make “flushable” wipes. (Read about the lawsuit in the *Forest Lake Times* at: <http://forestlaketimes.com/2015/07/01/princeton-joins-wyoming-in-wet-wipes-lawsuit/>.)

The proposed bill would:

- *Ban “flushable,” “septic safe,” or “sewer safe” labeling from nonwoven disposable products (wipes) sold in Minnesota.

- *Help change public behavior and over time reduce the amount of such wipes being flushed.

Fewer wipes flushed would reduce operation and maintenance costs for municipalities across the state.

Next Steps

The League will continue working with MPCA and other stakeholders on this issue during session and will enlist the help of cities. The League encourages you to mention this issue as you meet with your legislators in the coming weeks. The League will provide links to bills once they are introduced.

Your Help Needed—City Data:

If your city has any data on public works staff time and/or repair costs associated with these products being flushed into the wastewater system, please let League staff know (listed here: Contact Craig Johnson IGR Representative at (651) 281-1259 or (800) 925-1122 cjohnson@lmc.org or Contact Heather Corcoran IGR Liaison at (651) 281-1256 or (800) 925-1122 hcorcoran@lmc.org).

Other Resources:

- *Policy/Proposal sheet from MPCA (pdf) at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/document/leg-sy16-04pdf>

- *Video demonstration on flushable wipes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAI3Dttotw>

- *Star Tribune article: <http://www.startribune.com/flushable-wipes-can-cost-thousands-to-fix-clogged-pipes/298728221/>

- *Brainerd Dispatch article: <http://www.brainerddispatch.com/news/3709654-disposable-flushable-wipes-wreaking-havoc-wadena-sewers>

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