The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has inspired the world to model safe and best cleaning practices. But while disinfecting wipes are effective, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is seeing a rise in the number of wipes stuck on the screens at water reclamation plants (WRPs) that normally filter out debris during the first critical steps of the wastewater treatment process.

The MWRD is encouraging toilet users to still be mindful when flushing. That means only flushing toilet paper. Wipe products labeled as “flushable” can clog pipes and require unwanted plumber visits. They can also interrupt or damage equipment. By flushing with care, toilet users can protect the water environment and prevent costly damage from sewer overflows and backups.

“Toilet paper is the only item we should be flushing down a toilet,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “Wipes are helpful at a time we need to clean, but these are not flushable or biodegradable. Everything else should be deposited in the trash can, recycled, or composted.”

The MWRD is a member of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA). It advises that wipes, paper towels and feminine hygiene products when flushed can cause problems for utilities that amount to “billions of dollars in maintenance and repair costs.” These costs are ultimately passed on to taxpayers.

It’s a toilet, not a trashcan!

Wipe down bathrooms and counters and sanitize, but only flush toilet paper

Cashel says “only flush toilet paper!”

Screens are used to filter out debris as it reaches the MWRD water reclamation plants, but wipes, paper towels, tissues and other products can accumulate and stick to equipment. With more disinfecting wipes being used, the MWRD urges the public to only flush toilet paper.
It’s a toilet, not a trashcan! cont.

In these uncertain times of COVID-19 and shuttered schools, institutions and business, MWRD staff is still hard at work protecting the public health and the environment. Water continues flowing and the MWRD is here to clean it and return it to the environment, so keeping wipes and other harmful products out of the sewers and pipes is important to protecting the community.

“We thank the residents and business owners we serve for being vigilant in protecting our drains and pipes,” said MWRD Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos. “Together we can protect our essential systems and improve our water environment in the process.”

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Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrd.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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