

**“Save Your Pipes: Don’t Flush Baby Wipes”
Commissioner Remarks
Tuesday, January 21**

The last time I was at my local grocery store, I went into the aisle with all of the baby products and was overwhelmed with the amount of options there are. Many of these products’ labels indicate that they are not to be flushed but the reason we’re here today is because baby wipes are still flushed, which have environmental and economic impacts. So thank you, Aubrey, the Maine Waste Water Control Association, INDA, and the Portland Water District for taking the lead on this national problem, and I commend you for putting Maine at the forefront of seeking solutions.

The Department of Environmental Protection is delighted to support the “Save Your Pipes: Don’t Flush Baby Wipes” campaign.

Too many of us just flush the toilet and do not know or care to know what happens next but the Department of Environmental Protection would like to challenge all of us to think further than the flush. What goes down the toilet comes out eventually and our waste water treatment operators who are truly on the frontlines of protecting one of Maine’s most valuable natural resources – our clean water – must handle that.

Treatment operators have told the DEP that with the sales of wipes and new products growing exponentially, consumers can be confused by which ones can be flushed or not, leading to clogs. These clogs cost time and money for homeowners with septic systems and taxpayers who pay for public sewer systems.

Operators must divert resources from system maintenance and upgrades to the system -- often more efficient and desirable for the environment -- and unclog pumps caused by the flushing of baby wipes. Even when pumps and equipment clog with materials not designed to be flushed and can no longer function, it does not mean sewage stops.



Clogs contribute to sewer back-ups into homes, clogging of wastewater system equipment, difficulty maintaining septic systems, and sewer overflows which have negative impacts on the environment. Overflows flood pump stations and surge into our waterways. Sewer overflows can be a danger to public health and can also harm Maine's critical fish and shellfish, tourism, and recreation industries. Reducing clogs caused by flushing of baby wipes, can mean reducing harmful overflows ensuring our water bodies are protected.

Seemingly inconsequential individual actions make a big difference when taken collectively. The flushing of baby wipes does make a difference – it costs money to fix a clogged pipe, whether at your home or at your town's waste water plant, and it contaminates our water with harmful bacteria.

So again, I challenge you – think further than the flush, save your pipes, don't flush baby wipes – the environmental and economic benefits are clear.

