

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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September 25, 2014

“The Drain Campaign”

The label on the disposable paper product may say it can be flushed but those “disposable” paper products are causing lots of problems in city drainage systems.

“Sewage drainage pipes are meant for carrying water, excrement and toilet paper and that’s absolutely it. Baby wipes,



tissues, diapers, and feminine products should all go into the trash and not into the toilet,” said Dennis Watts, Water and Sewer Director for the City of Norfolk.

When it comes to items found in the city’s drainage pipes, Watts has seen it all. City workers have removed toys, towels, articles of clothing and once even a wedding dress from Norfolk’s sewage pipes. It’s a wonder those items can make it down the drain but the person who thinks they are getting rid of a problem is only causing a bigger one.

“When you put wipes and any other products that aren’t supposed to be flushed down your drains, you greatly increase the likelihood of having a blockage. A blocked sewage pipe doesn’t let sewer water go anywhere except back into people’s homes, out manholes and into basements,”

Dennis Watts, City of Norfolk water/sewer director, demonstrates to students and other groups how many paper products do not break down in the sewer system.

Watts said.

He told of a recent *Consumer Reports* test that was done to see if several brands of disposable wipes that were labeled flushable would actually dissolve in water. Testers found that while toilet paper disintegrated after about eight seconds, the disposable wipes hadn’t broken down after 30 minutes.

Watts said that even when those items make it through the drainage pipes, they can wreak havoc with the filtering and cleaning system at the wastewater treatment plant.

Norfolk is not the only city that is spending many man-hours and funds to remove debris from sewage pipes. Metropolitan cities like Los Angeles have determined non-flushable items in drainage systems to be a major problem. Last summer in London, England, a combination of cooking oils and disposable wipes created a 15-ton clog in one of the city’s pipes. An effort is being made in many cities to educate the citizens about what can and cannot be put into the drainage system. One campaign tells people to flush only the Three P’s: Pee, Poop and (toilet) Paper.

“The toilet is not a trash can. If you have grease to dispose of, pour it into a can or other container, let it cool and then pour it into the trash. Some people think that as long as they run hot water at the same time as they pour the oil down the drain that it won’t stick to the pipes but it will. The water and the oil soon cools in the pipes and adheres to the interior, causing it to build up with sediment and eventually clog,” Watts said.

Other items that should never be flushed down a toilet are kitty litter, coffee grounds, condoms and dental floss.

“Medications should never be flushed down the toilet. Take them to the approved disposal site in the entrance of the Norfolk Police Station,” Watts said.

Watts added that household cleaning products should also never be flushed or put down the kitchen drain as those chemicals will eventually reach the Elkhorn River. Instead, citizens can take those items to the Household Hazardous Waste Facility at 610 East Monroe Avenue.

For more information or to schedule a program on keeping city pipes clog free, email cityofnorfolk@gmail.com or call 402-844-2034.