

Wipes Labeling can Save Ratepayers \$ Keep Waters Clean

- ***S.480, An Act protecting wastewater and sewerage systems through the labeling of non-flushable wipes - Sponsor: Senator James B. Eldridge, Referred to Jt Committee on Environment and Natural Resources***
- ***H.805, An Act protecting wastewater and sewerage systems through the labeling of non-flushable wipes - Sponsors: Rep. Sean Garbelley, Rep. Steven Owens, Referred to Jt Committee on Environment and Natural Resources***

ISSUE

Massachusetts sewers face roughly **\$10 million in annual** avoidable costs for clogs, fouled pumps and resulting sanitary sewer overflows. As the popularity of various wipes increases and users flush them, these costs will increase. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of wipes increased greatly, causing dangerous clogs and public health issues for sewer systems and workers.

Since the early 2000s, wipes have been aggressively marketed as a replacement for toilet paper, mops, cleaning brushes and rags. This multi-billion-dollar industry[1] has had disastrous impacts on local sewer systems.

KEY POINTS

This legislation targets only wipes and other products that are **not flushable according to industry**.

- Unlike toilet paper, wipes are not “dispersible” in normal sewer conditions
- There is lack of consistency in labeling, and some wipes product labels have no information about disposal at all. This creates consumer confusion about the proper disposal of these products.
- Wipes Contain Plastic: Nearly all baby wipes, household cleaning wipes and cosmetic wipes have a significant amount of plastic in them. Plastic fibers are engineered for strength, and these wipes don’t break down, they rope together and create massive clogs that catch other debris.
- Clogs and fouling from flushed wipes costs sewer operators in Massachusetts nearly \$10 million annually.
- Wipes should be properly and clearly labeled.

ACTION REQUESTED—Clear Consumer Messaging

- We respectfully ask that the Legislature pass these bills to classify wipes, using wipes-industry standards as “non-flushable.”
- We ask that those wipes that do not meet industry standards for dispersibility have prominent, mandatory “Do Not Flush” labelling, following NACWA labeling guidelines.

[1] “One report from a product development company estimated the global market for these nonwoven wipes of all kinds to be \$16.6 billion in 2018, with a growth rate of 5.7% a year, which would push the total to nearly \$22B by 2023”

(<https://undark.org/2019/12/23/flushable-wipes/>)

In addition to the associations listed above, these associations and organizations support these bills:

MAWEA, Massachusetts Water Environment Association

MMA, Massachusetts Municipal Association

MWRA Advisory Board

WAC, Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA

WSCAC, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee to the MWRA

NEWEA, New England Water Environment Association

Yankee Onsite Wastewater Association