

Out of Toilet Paper? You Have Other Options. Just Don't Flush Them!

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With the ongoing scarcity of toilet paper, you may be down to your last few squares, wondering what happens next. The truth is that tissues, a paper towel, wet wipes, or scraps of fabric will all do the job just fine (with varying degrees of comfort). But—and this is very important—*don't flush any alternative toilet paper down the toilet.*

It doesn't matter if you're on a city system or a septic system, flushing anything other than toilet paper will cause clogs, back-ups, and additional work for municipal employees or septic companies. For disposal methods, you've got options: A good small trash can is a start, or you could upgrade to an excellent bidet and skip the wiping altogether. In an emergency, you can use a spare plastic bag. We know that filling a receptacle with used alternative toilet paper may seem a little gross. We all have to make sacrifices. And if you're tempted to send a stray wet wipe down the toilet, thinking, "Just once won't hurt," keep this in mind: As bad as things are now, sewage-filled streets are way worse.

That's not hypothetical. Many towns and cities are already dealing with the aftermath of people flushing the wrong things. A video from a Novato, California, sewage treatment plant shows clogged machinery spraying water and wet wipes all over the flooded floor. In Redding, California, municipal workers investigated a backup and found shredded T-shirts clogging the sewer system. In Manchester, Connecticut, officials noted that four of 11 pump stations contained pumps that were clogged with wipes. And this situation isn't just confined to the US. Officials in the UK, Australia, and Canada, among other nations, are warning the public about the consequences of flushing non-flushables.

But why? What's the difference? Toilet paper is very fragile and is designed to self-destruct in water with very little agitation. Tissues, on the other hand, are made to stand firm against a 100 mph sneeze discharging from your nose. Although the two products might have the same general look and feel, this video shows the difference in their durability. It takes less than 30 seconds of agitation for the toilet paper to be almost completely broken down. The tissue, however, remains fully intact. In plumbing, the bits of toilet paper can speed down the waste lines, but tissues remain big enough to catch on something, contributing to a clog.

Flushable wipes deserve a special mention. Don't flush them. Cottonelle, the maker of a flushable wipe, has a video that shows its wipes breaking down in a similar fashion to toilet paper. But there is a disclaimer that the wipe in the video had a one-hour pre-soak. Then it still took six minutes of agitation for it to fully break up. Toilet paper, by comparison, nearly vanished after 30 seconds. The delay in flushable wipes' degradation is enough time to cause a problem, as multiple examples in this post prove. This point is backed by longstanding advice from the New York City Department of Sanitation, and it was recently reiterated with new warnings from various local officials, everywhere from Greenfield, Massachusetts to South Burlington, Vermont.

To reinforce this point one last time, we'll close with some detailed images of wastewater treatment workers at New York City's Newtown Creek plant raking mounds of un-disintegrated "flushable" wipes out of the jammed machinery a few years back. Don't make those folks have to rake out your wipes again.
