

Position Statement on so-called ‘flushable’ items

April 2022

Boomerang Alliance calls on the Australian government to require DO NOT FLUSH labels on all items that are found in our waterways and have most likely begun their journey in a bathroom; and to impose heavy penalties on companies that engage in misleading messaging about their products being ‘flushable’, ignoring the environmental impacts.

The toilet is not a bin and the most important question should not be “can it be flushed?” or “is it flushable?” but “SHOULD it be flushed?”



Put simply by many water authorities, only the three P’s: poo, pee and (toilet) paper should be flushed. Vomit and menorrhea (menstrual fluid) are also acceptable.

This SYDNEY WATER animation sums it up well: <https://youtu.be/tL9PjkzfaU8>

If the item contains any plastic (fossil fuel derived, bioplastic, oxodegradable or any other polymer) the answer to flushing must be no and it should be labelled clearly: DO NOT FLUSH, in English, community languages and/or with universally recognised graphic, such as the one pictured here.

To determine which items need this label we refer to [items found and documented by the CSIRO, the Australian Marine Debris Initiative or by Sydney Water](#), including but not limited to:

- Cotton buds
- Wipes
- Sanitary items
- Other personal care products, e.g. dental floss and picks
- Clothing tags

Simple solutions for everyone:

- Have a bin in your bathroom - and put wipes in a garbage bin if you use them.
- Only flush poo, pee and paper.
- Consume wisely and help to reduce demand for materials that are possible sources of [marine debris](#) via the sewerage system or storm water, e.g. avoid wipes; use washable cloths.

Simple solution for Manufacturers:

- Do not mislead the public by calling your products ‘flushable’ and ignoring the environmental impacts.
- Label any potential marine debris items clearly DO NOT FLUSH - and use an approved standard graphic, universally understood to mean the same.

Simple solutions for retailers, marketing teams, Influencers, media providers:

- Be clear that products that should not be flushed are promoted that way.
- Promote responsible disposal of bathroom products.
- Do not condone messaging that may encourage inappropriate behaviour, e.g. flushing wipes, without a disclaimer that this practise is harmful to plumbing infrastructure, public health and marine life.

Clothing Pegs



Clothing Tags



Sanitary Items



Personal Care Products



Cotton Buds



Microplastics



Nurdles



Image source: [Sewage Outfall Related Marine Debris](#)

Sydney Water's message from 2010 still rings true:

"For most people, 'wastewater' is probably out of sight and out of mind. Pull the plug - and it's gone. Flush the toilet - and forget about it. But the truth is, wastewater represents a significant link between our homes, industries and the environment. That's because much of the treated wastewater is eventually released into waterways and oceans. Wastewater is 99.9% water. The remaining 0.1% is generally dissolved or suspended materials.

Our wastewater system is mainly designed to transport and treat human waste. It isn't designed to take domestic rubbish and waste... like oil, cotton-tips, band-aid wrappers, plastics and food waste. Those unwanted materials cause real problems for the sewerage pipes - like blockages and chokes. These in turn can cause sewage overflows where raw sewage can enter our waterways or homes.

Even though Sydney Water works hard to safeguard water supplies, maintain healthy ecosystems and treat wastewater - we all have a responsibility to care for our precious water resources." - 2010 Sydney Water

Standards Australia says:

"The principal objective of wastewater systems management is to protect public health, the environment, the work, health and safety of workers and sustainable development."

[CSIRO has thoroughly documented the harm caused by marine debris](#), most of which is plastic - which "injures and kills wildlife, has the potential to transport chemical contaminants, and may pose a threat to human health....Water flow (e.g. storm water) and wind contribute to the transport of debris towards marine ecosystems."

It is well documented by beach clean up volunteers and researchers that [certain kinds of plastic waste is found near sewerage outfalls](#), e.g. [plastic stemmed cotton buds](#). Education and product changes are needed to prevent this problem.

14 LIFE
BELOW WATER**Sustainable Development Goal #14 - Life Below Water:**

Healthy oceans and seas are essential to our existence. They cover 70 percent of our planet and we rely on them for food, energy and water. Yet, we have managed to do tremendous damage to these precious resources. We must protect them by eliminating pollution and immediately start to responsibly manage and protect all marine life around the world.

Standards Australia draft standard for Flushable Items (2021) also states: "There are many factors that contribute to successful wastewater treatment systems: One of these is the prevention of blockages. When blockages occur, there is an unacceptable risk that wastewater may spill from the system and create public health and environmental risks along with otherwise unnecessary expenditure in rectifying the issues." (page v)

This is another reason to ensure no plastic enters the wastewater system in the first place, as various screening systems may be by-passed (e.g. in heavy rain) and be ineffective in removing them. Other systems, such as grinders, may create more microplastics downstream.


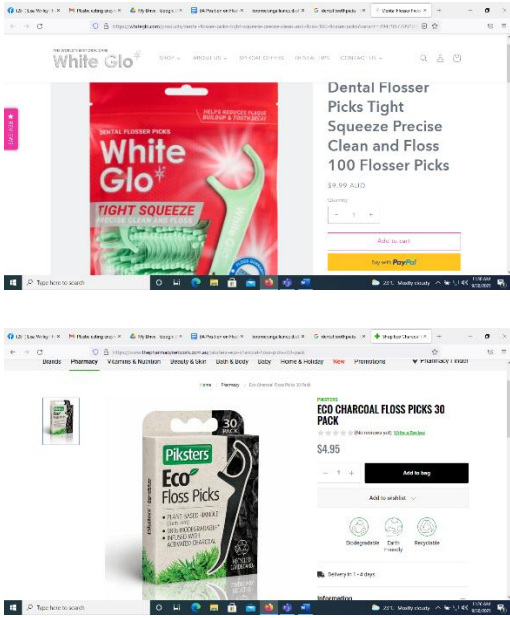
This position paper is based on Boomerang's October 2021 Submission to the Standards Australia, Draft Standard DR AS/NZS 5328, Flushable Products.

SAMPLE DO NOT FLUSH SYMBOLS**REFERENCES:**

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2. <https://www.sydneywater.com.au/Education/Tours/virtualtour/html/secondary-treatment.html>
3. <https://www.sydneywater.com.au/Education/Tours/virtualtour/html/tertiary-treatment.html>
4. Sydney Water Glossary:
<https://www.sydneywater.com.au/Education/Tours/virtualtour/html/glossary.html#Inorganic%20compounds>
5. <https://www.wsaa.asn.au/news/new-flushable-products-standard-help-clean-mess>

6. Only flush the three P's: <https://www.hunterwater.com.au/news/reminder-for-customers-to-only-flush-the-three-ps>
7. SOURCES OF PLASTICS: <https://research.csiro.au/marinedebris/sources-of-plastics/>
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9. Sydney Water: <https://www.sydneywater.com.au/Education/Tours/virtualtour/html/wastewater-journey.html>
10. [Managed water cycle - The natural water cycle that has been modified by people to ensure a constant water supply and the safe disposal of wastewater.](#)
11. Fatbergs - cooking oils and fat and so called 'flushable wipes': <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-10/fatberg-how-to-remove-and-stop-them-building-up/10701656>
12. ACCC lost appeal re 'flushable wipes': <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/penalty-for-kimberly-clark-for-false-claims-flushable-wipes-were-made-in-australia>
13. The Guardian 7/10/21 - The Unflushables: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/oct/07/the-unflushables-sydney-water-warning-after-weird-flushes-cause-blockages>
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16. ISO/TR 24524:2019(en) Service activities relating to drinking water supply, wastewater and stormwater systems — Hydraulic, mechanical and environmental conditions in wastewater transport systems: <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:tr:24524:ed-1:v1:en>
17. Sewage Outfall Related Marine Debris: <https://www.cleanocean.org/cotton-bud-survey.html>
18. SO Shire Submission to Upper House May 2021: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/71446/0057%20SO%20Shire.pdf>
19. Why you should never flush baby wipes: <https://www.insider.com/why-you-should-never-flush-baby-wipe-down-the-toilet-2019-12>

PROBLEM PRODUCTS THAT NEED DO NOT FLUSH SYMBOL

	Cotton Buds https://www.chemistwarehouse.com.au/Buy/79596/Health-Beauty-Cotton-Buds-with-Chrome-Lid-300-Pieces
	ECO Toothpicks - 'biodegradable' These will make some customers think its ok to flush!

WIPES:

What are wet wipes made of?

Ninety percent of wet wipes on the market are produced from nonwoven fabrics made of polyester or polypropylene. The material is moistened with water or other liquids (e.g., isopropyl alcohol) depending on the applications.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wet_wipe

"WSAA and the urban water industry in Australia and New Zealand have been concerned about the contribution of wet wipes products to pipe blockages for some time." - <https://www.wsaa.asn.au/> is Water Services Association of Australia.

There are a wide array of opinions and claims about wipes:

Can you flush wipes? Manufacturers of baby wipes will often indicate on the packaging that the product is "flushable." Plumbing experts say **there's no such thing as a flushable wipe**. Because wipes don't break down in water, they can clog up plumbing systems in a home, and damage pipes and machinery at wastewater treatment plants.

Source: <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.insider.com/why-you-should-never-flush-baby-wipe-down-the-toilet-2019-12&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1661398882205838&usg=AOvVawOsdYKa-yWKSfzYX2Vvb9ha> (20 Dec 2019)



Did you know Men are bigger users of wipes than women? What are Man Wipes? “MAN WIPES are **flushable moist cleansing wipes with a masculine Executive Scent** made to keep you feeling fresh and clean all day long. Engineered specifically for men, use MAN WIPES in addition to toilet paper to effectively clean and eliminate any unwanted residue.” - <https://www.amazon.com/MANGROOMER-Flushable-Personal-Engineered-Executive/dp/B0713ZQY4D>



