

Sewer System Challenges: Wipes and Grease in Pipes

The Wasatch Front Water Quality Council has been actively trying to reduce problems caused by wet wipes and disposal of grease in the sewer system. This problem costs public utility systems and its citizens millions of dollars a year in Utah.

Unfortunately, this is a battle and concern we are still losing.



The inability to prevent use and disposal of wet wipes and grease through the sewer will continue to cause increasing sewer rates. Sewer systems do not have the ability to prevent their use and can only respond to the problem.



“It looks like you are pulling up Cousin It,”
(Courtesy of Peter Hadfield)

Preventing wet wipes from blocking sewers is just one part of the wet-wipe problem. The wipes also might pose environmental risks, because they’re made from plastics and synthetic cellulosic fibers, some of which are non-degradable. Once flushed, these plastics disintegrate into microplastics, a type of debris that is smaller than five millimeters in length. The particles cluster in aquatic environments with microplastics from other consumer products, such as some cleansers, exfoliants, and toothpastes.



Going forward, the challenge is to determine what is best for the citizens of Utah. Sewer systems can be cleaned more frequently, costs for backup can be paid collectively, and equipment can be replaced more frequently, or citizens can change their behavior and these costs can be avoided.

“Part of the picture is assessing the environmental concern and weighing it against the societal benefit.”

