

# AB 1672 (Bloom)

## Proper Labeling for Wet Wipes

### Fact Sheet

#### PROBLEM

Single-use wet wipes have been gaining popularity over the last decade nationwide, which was further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Single-use wet wipes are used for a variety of daily purposes, and some are advertised as “flushable”, but others have no disposal information on the packaging at all.

Consumers frequently use the wastewater system as a means of disposal, flushing wet wipes like diaper wipes, cosmetic wipes, and surface cleaning and disinfectant wipes, even when they are not intended to be flushed. The sale of both flushable and non-flushable wipes and lack of proper labeling leads to consumer confusion about which wipes can be flushed. While consumer behavior cannot be legislated, legislation can require clear labeling to improve consumer understanding of what is flushable and what is not.

Since Governor Newsom’s Stay-At-Home order, [Executive Order N-33-20](#), enacted on March 19, 2020, consumers are over-purchasing toilet paper, resulting in shortages which have led people buying alternatives, like baby wipes, and flushing them. As a result, local officials are reporting a large influx of non-flushable debris in sewer systems, which causes significant and costly maintenance. Wastewater operators in Redding, San Clemente, Orange County, Lakeport, Victorville, Beale Air Force Base, Napa, Cupertino, Tiburon, Marin, San Diego, reporting that wipes are clogging sewage systems. These clogs also result in environmental damages when sewers overflow and when wipes shed plastic microfibers, causing microplastic particles in wastewater effluent.

For over a decade, wipes have been one of the leading causes of residential and public sewer systems backups and equipment problems, costing

California wastewater operators at least \$50 million a year.

Following the onset of the statewide Stay-At-Home order, agencies that have never experienced wipes related sewer overflows have now reported their first wipes related clog and sewer spills. Several agencies have reported total equipment failures when their pump systems are overwhelmed with wipes, costing them \$60K per pump. Agencies are reporting increases in maintenance intervals to unclog heavy equipment like pumps and lift stations, and to clear sewer lines with high powered jets. Wastewater collection and treatment is an essential public service. During a global pandemic, the field operators are risking their health through exposure to raw sewage more frequently to manage wipes related repairs and maintenance.

#### SOLUTION

Wipes that are not intended by the manufacturer to be flushable, which are mostly made with plastic materials, should be clearly and conspicuously labeled as “DO NOT FLUSH.” In order to address consumer confusion, AB 1672 would define these non-flushable wipes as “covered products,” and require them to be clearly labeled with “DO NOT FLUSH” labeling and a universal moniker in accordance with widely accepted voluntary guidelines established by the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry’s code of practice. The bill would also require the manufacturers of these products of “covered entities” to conduct a comprehensive statewide consumer education and outreach campaign to inform the public not to flush products covered by the label requirement. As well as requiring manufactures to participate in a collection study conduction in collaboration with wastewater agencies to gain an understanding of consumer behavior on premoistened nonwoven disposable wipes.

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## EXISTING LAW

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There are currently no state or federal statutory requirements that govern how non-woven single-use wipes products are labeled or requiring information about intended disposal methods. This year, Washington State enacted the first-in-the-nation labeling requirements for non-flushable products.

The State and Regional Water Resources Control Boards (Water Boards) authorize local public agencies to discharge wastewater in compliance with U.S. Clean Water Act and Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act. The State Water Board has a zero-tolerance policy for any unauthorized discharge of sewage for any reason, including accidental overflows. Violations of this policy can result in fines and penalties for the responsible agency. The Water Board also requires all sewer overflows to be reported to the Board in a specified time period and requires the report to include information about the main cause of the overflow. Data about spills caused by wipes debris is maintained by the Water Board and can be accessed by the public.

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## BACKGROUND

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On March 17, 2020, the California Water Boards sent out [a notice](#) advising Californians that wet wipes and paper towels can clog sewer systems and shouldn't be flushed. The notice was prompted by the Centers for Disease Control recommendations to clean surfaces with disinfecting wipes to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In the public notification, the Board mentions that wastewater treatment facilities around the state were reporting issues with their sewer management collection systems due to wipes being flushed. In order to prevent sewer spills, especially during the COVID-19 emergency, they are urging Californians to not flush disinfectant wipes or paper towels down the toilet.

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## SUPPORT

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California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) (Co-Sponsor)  
National Stewardship Action Council (Co-Sponsor)  
INDA – Association of the Nonwoven Fabric Industry (Co-Sponsor)

5 Gyres Institute  
7<sup>th</sup> Generation Advisors  
Association of California Water Agencies  
Bay Area Pollution Prevention Group  
Californians Against Waste  
Cal. Product Stewardship Council  
Cal. Resource Recovery Association  
Cal. Special Districts Association  
Calaveras County  
Camarillo Sanitary District  
The Center for Oceanic Awareness,  
Research, and Education  
Central Contra Costa Sanitary District  
Central Marin Sanitation Agency  
City of Bellflower  
City of Camarillo  
City of Maywood  
City of Oxnard  
City of Pico Rivera  
City of Roseville  
City of Thousand Oaks  
Delta Diablo Sanitary District  
Dublin San Ramon Services District  
East Bay Municipal Utility District  
Eastern Municipal Water District  
Goleta Sanitary District  
Goleta West Sanitary District  
Ironhouse Sanitary District  
Inland Empire Utilities Agencies  
LA County Sanitation Districts  
Leucadia Wastewater District  
Las Virgenes Municipal Water District  
Monterey One Water  
National Assoc. of Clean Water Agencies  
Orange County Sanitation District  
Oro Loma Sanitary District  
Placer County  
Plastic Pollution Coalition  
Rethink Waste  
Rincon Del Diablo Water District  
Sacramento Area Sewer District  
Sacramento Regional Sanitation District  
San Francisco Public Utilities Commission  
Sonoma Water  
Stege Sanitary District  
Union Sanitary District  
VEOLIA  
Victor Valley Water Reclamation Authority