

Cooking oil and wet wipes main culprits in sewer

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ROBERT STEVEN

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See how well toilet paper breaks down when compared to wet wipes, clusters of which are clogging up sewer pipes across NSW.

Don't rush to flush, Taupo District Council says.

Flushed wet wipes and cooking fat are being blamed for a pipe blockage which sent wastewater into Lake Taupō near Two Mile Bay on Sunday.

Kevin Strongman, operational services manager at the council, said residents should be careful what they send down the drains.



ROBERT STEVEN/STUFF

'Fat bergs' have entered Lake Taupo via an outlet near Hawai St. Swimmers are encouraged to stay away from a water outlet until warnings are removed.

"Don't flush wet wipes, even if the packaging says they are flushable," he said.

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*** Used wet wipes clogging Blenheim pipes**

"In areas where root intrusion [into sewage pipes] has occurred, these items build up quite quickly and cause blockages."



Wastecare

Scrape oil and fat into the rubbish bin - don't flush it down the sink, where it can form 'fat bergs' that block wastewater pipes, Taupo District Council says.

Cooking oils, fat and grease solidify when they cool, so should not be washed down the sink, Strongman said.

"Wait for oil to cool, then scrape it into the bin."

The only things that should be flushed down the loo are urine, poo and toilet paper, he said.



ILLAWARRA MERCURY

Wet wipes may say they're flushable, but they're not.

"Larger objects our team have found [in wastewater pipes] include building materials, rubbish, clothes, and even curtains."

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Council workers were constantly monitoring the wastewater system, Strongman said.

"[The council] spends \$100,000 each year checking pipes and infrastructure via closed circuit television monitoring, as well as \$50,000 on cleaning the pipes with high-pressure water.



ROBERT STEVEN/STUFF

Swimmers are advised to stay away from a water outlet, where 'fat bergs' have surfaced.

"We also spend up to around \$700,000 a year on renewing pipes throughout the district."

Of the nine wastewater incidents that took place since January 2016, four were caused by wet wipes/fat blockages; three were due to broken pipes; one was caused by a surge of stormwater entering the sewer during an extreme weather event; and one was due to human error, with a pump not restarted after routine maintenance, Strongman said.

The vast size of Lake Taupō helped to any minimise harmful effects of overflows, he said.

"Most events are quickly diluted, but there is a localised effect with increased bacteria in the area – this is why clear health warning signage is erected," he said.

Water quality testing ensured minimal risks to swimmers' health, he said.

"In most cases water quality returns to normal after two or three days, depending on weather conditions and the size of the overflow," he said.

"We take a conservative approach with our health warnings and ensure we see close to background levels of E.coli before moving signage, even though guideline values are higher."

How to dispose of oil, fats and grease:

* Cool and collect fats, oil and grease in a covered container and put them in a rubbish bin, add to compost, or dig into your garden.

* Scrape pots and pans into your rubbish bin before rinsing and washing.

* Add a strainer to your sink to catch food scraps and other solids that can collect with any fats and create a blockage.

*** To report drain overflows, call the council on 07 376 0899 or 0800 ASK TDC**

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