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Protect our Pipes

When you go to the restroom at a school, restaurant, or really any place except probably your house, you may see a sign on the stall door saying something like PLEASE DO NOT FLUSH: hand towels, sanitary napkins, diapers, etc. These signs may seem hopelessly optimistic but they are warning us to prevent a greater hidden catastrophe: blocking our sewers that can lead to environmental and health crises. If you happen to flush any of those things you probably are not thinking about the damage this rebel artifact can cause.

After you flush something down the toilet, your wastewater encounters several stages from preliminary treatment when big items like coins, rags and jewelry are removed, all the way to a final treatment where the water is released and reused in our environment. The problem is that after years of heavy work by our sewage system, all this strain can break down the pipes causing flooding and pollution to spread. In an episode of Mike Rowe's Dirty Jobs called Manhole Rehabilitator, I learned that the men and women who work to keep the underground infrastructure of our communities running can be affected by people who throw away improper items like needles, pencils and other metals. The WIPPES Act was created to help stop the disposal of non-flushable items that damage the sewers leading to costly repairs. If this act is passed this will help to further protect our pipes by making companies label unflushable items as "Do not flush."

There are actually not many things that should be flushed down the toilet. In fact, there are only three things that you are allowed to flush: toilet paper, pee, and poop, or the 3 P's. While there are not many things you should flush down the toilet, there are many things that you avoid flushing including coins, rags, paper that is not toilet paper, food, books and way more. There are many videos on the internet of children who would really like to see their toys or food get flushed down the toilet, but when the water starts to rise these funny moments turn to panic. By obeying the rules, you are contributing to protecting the future of our hidden pipes, and keeping the house clean of unwelcome visitors that carry away what we do not want to see revisiting our homes, namely, the 3 P's: toilet paper, pee, and poop.

In conclusion, what not to flush and what to flush is a very big deal. If everyone flushes down rags and other items that hurt our pipes, then the wastewater system could break leaving us with polluted water that may end up back in our drinking water. So next time you are in a restroom and looking at the signs saying "PLEASE DO NOT FLUSH" think to yourself, "If I flush this item will it hurt or protect our pipes?". Let's work to make our future one with clean and safe water.