



June 21, 2017

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
U.S. House of Representatives
2136 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Norton:

I am writing to thank you for your support opposing efforts that would undermine the recently enacted local legislation in the District of Columbia on the labeling of wipes. It's my hope that by informing members of Congress we can explain that waste water pipes clogged by wipes is an issue affecting the entire industry.

Overturning this law would have a detrimental effect on our ability to treat waste water here in Washington, D.C. and would almost certainly result in higher future costs for our customers. That's beyond the obvious implications for upsetting local autonomy on an issue that relates to strictly to the toilets, sinks and showers of Washington, D.C.

As you may know, DC Water operates the Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant - the largest wastewater treatment plant of its kind in the world. Our wastewater treatment service area covers more than 725 square miles in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia providing treatment for more than 2.2 million people. That includes 199,000 federal employees here in D.C., including members of the United States Congress and the White House.

We maintain more than 1,800 miles of pipes and 9 wastewater pumping stations. It is vitally important that our collections system remains clear and free of clogs. Unfortunately, as any water authority in the United States will tell you, non-dispersible items, such as wipes, clog sewer pipes and pump stations causing significant infrastructure damage and inhibit the treatment process. Sewage overflows caused by system blockages also pose significant health risks to our community and our waterways.

Recently, DC Water responded to an incident involving almost 2,400 tons of debris clogging the sewer pipes around the Kennedy Center. Wipes were on the leading edge of the debris, creating a dam that significantly hindered the flow of wastewater. For significant clogs like this we can spend upwards of \$100,000 on repairs and we spend easily \$50,000 each year just on preventative maintenance caused by wipe clogs. This puts significant stress on our already aging infrastructure.

There have been misleading attempts by the industry to claim that wipes are not a significant problem, including a single study from New York. But that study used a very small sample of

wipes taken at one time, right after a major storm had likely flushed out that city's combined sewer system. Other reputable studies actually show a higher percentage of flushable wipes in sewer systems – and that's obviously what our day-to-day experience tells us here in Washington, D.C.

Currently, the wipes claimed as "flushable" by the industry are in fact not dispersible, meaning unlike toilet paper, they do not break down in the wastewater system. When a wipe is flushed, it remains intact until it reaches the treatment plant-if it makes it through the system at all. Additionally, wipes bond with fats, oils and greases, also known as FOG, to create large "fatbergs" in sewer pipes. These giant masses clog the system leading to sewer backups and extensive repair costs. These clogs occur not only in the DC Water pipe system, but in also in homeowner sewer pipes causing extensive damage. Wipes can wrap around sewer pumps causing them to cease crucial functioning placing the collection system at risk for failure. Because they do not break down, wipes must also be physically removed from the system by wastewater employees, placing them at increased risk of injury and illness. After removal, they must then be hauled away and disposed of at a waste facility.

I want to restate an important point; we are not in any way banning the sale of wipes. We simply want to require that wipes that aren't actually flushable be labeled "do not flush." It's our strong belief that this common sense legislation is in the best interests of the District of Columbia and in fact has merits for other parts of the country. We are already sharing information about this legislation with our peers in the industry.

Please convey to members of Congress how important this legislation is to the water customers of the District of Columbia and how important it is to our mission. It's my strong hope that the wipes industry simply sells wipes that are in fact flushable or be honest about the fact that they are not flushable with simple, easy to read labels.

Please reach out to me or our government affairs manager Vincent Morris at 202-787-2081, with any questions you have on this issue.

Thank you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George S. Hawkins". The signature is stylized and cursive.

George S. Hawkins
CEO and General Manager