



Water district: Don't flush consumer wipes

By Portland Water District

REGIONAL (Oct 11): Over the last few years the Portland Water District has experienced an increase in wastewater pump station malfunctions. Crews regularly need to unclog mounds of disposable wipes from pumps, at considerable expense and environmental consequence. Attempts to address the problem with retrofits and operational changes have not been successful. Now the Portland Water District will try installing grates and is considering construction of a \$4.5 million screening facility.

"Disposable wipes, even flushable wipes, should not go down the drain," said Tom Hume, senior wastewater systems operator for the Portland Water District. "Most often they end up clogging pumping stations. If they do make it to the wastewater plant, they could cause more damage and ultimately have to be removed at a greater expense."

Tom Hume removed approximately 75 pounds from a pump at the Cottage Place Pumping Station in Westbrook on Oct. 1. "We've removed large items such as plastic jugs and hard hats from pumps. But even the small items like dental floss and pieces of plastic cause problems," he said.

"We believe much of the problem is due to confusion over what is and what isn't flushable," stated Chris Crovo, executive director of asset management and planning. The Portland Water District warns that the only material that should be flushed is toilet paper. Many consumer wipe labels indicate that they should not be flushed. Others recommend that only one or two wipes be flushed at a time. And still others do not indicate how to dispose of the product.

According to MarketResearch.com, the consumer wipes market continues to boom. They report that 60 percent of adults admit to using household cleaning wipes. Continued growth is forecasted for the market with sales crossing the \$2 billion mark by 2010. Experts say there is plenty of room to expand into the health and beauty wipes market and newer, innovative "wipe on" products will emerge.

Sample Wipes List:

Baby wipes

Pet care wipes

Moist towelettes

Toilet training wipes

Tissue wipes

Mosquito wipes

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