

Future Trend: Reduced Disposal of Commonly Flushed Items

Trend definition and relevance to DWMP

Items flushed down toilets inappropriately, particularly wet wipes, are a major cause of sewer blockages, which can lead to property flooding, storm overflow discharges, and pollution incidents. The disposal of fats, oils and grease (FOG) from kitchens also damages the sewer network, as these substances can accumulate, solidify and adhere to sewer walls.

The continued flushing of wet wipes and incorrect disposal of FOG are key contributors to the unacceptably high number of blockages and pollution incidents experienced across the Thames Water region and throughout the UK.

Each year, we respond to around 75,000 sewer blockages, with wet wipes being the number one cause¹. We remove approximately 3.8 billion flushed wet wipes from our sewer network annually, at a cost of around £18 million per year¹. In some cases, wet wipes and FOG combine to form huge 'fatbergs' that can severely restrict sewer capacity and are costly and dangerous to remove. The photograph below shows our teams removing a 100-tonne fatberg discovered in Feltham, west London, highlighting the scale of this challenge.

Stage of DWMP used	
Risk assessment	✗
Plan development	✓
Impact/Importance	
Short term (2035)	Low
Medium term (2045)	Medium
Long term (2055)	High
Example PIs affected by this trend	
	Total pollution incidents
	Serious pollution incidents
	External flooding

Trend description, uncertainty and potential impact on our region

Thames Water workers remove a fatberg in Feltham, West London



Source: Thames Water, 2025

- Growing public awareness of the impacts of wet wipes and FOG, alongside new legislation targeting plastic-containing wet wipes, may reduce inappropriate disposal behaviours over time, improving sewer performance. However, these benefits remain too uncertain to include in our DWMP risk assessments. Instead, our long-term plan will include measures to influence customer behaviour across the region and within blockage and pollution hotspots.
- In November 2025², the UK Government announced legislation to ban the sale of wet wipes containing plastic in England from 2027. While this legislation is expected to have a positive impact on sewer performance and the environment, its effectiveness could be further enhanced through the introduction of 'flushability' standards for other wipe products and mandatory 'no flush' labelling³.
- Forecasting future trends in the disposal of wet wipes and FOG remains challenging because they depend on government policy and customer behaviour. As a result, the DWMP assumes that current disposal behaviours will continue throughout the risk assessment period.



References

- 1 'Thames Water removes 100-tonne fatberg from west London sewer' 6 October 2025, Thames Water.
<https://www.thameswater.co.uk/news/2025/oct/thames-water-removes-100-tonne-fatberg>.
- 2 'New law bans plastic wet wipes to protect rivers and seas' 18 November 2025, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP and Emma Hardy MP. www.gov.uk/government/news/new-law-bans-plastic-wet-wipes-to-protect-rivers-and-seas.
- 3 'Wet wipe ban a step in the right direction.' 22 April 2024, Water UK.
<https://www.water.org.uk/news-views-publications/views/wet-wipe-ban-step-right-direction>.

