

Flushable wipes causing big problems for city sewers

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. (WEAU)- What goes down your drain could be costing you and the city big money in the long run.

Jeff Pippenger is Eau Claire's Utilities Administrator. He says in the last eight years, the city has been dealing with a growing problem of flushable wipes clogging city sewers.

"We have seen a rise of the rags in our system and they have created the problem for us," Pippenger said.

In 2014 the city responded to 82 calls for plugged pumps due to the wipes at a price tag of \$11,480.

In an effort to prevent more of those problems, the city's wastewater treatment plant has taken proactive steps to clean out the wipes before they cause even more trouble.

In last year alone 130 tons of wipes were collected and taken to an area landfill. It cost the city \$8,200 to dispose of those wipes. The city said the cost for staff to clean wipes out of two pump stations in 2014 was \$15,000.

It's not just the city that's seeing the problem. Wiersgalla Plumbing says flushable wipes are causing big problems for homeowners.

“We see it on average for one out of three jobs,” Christina Wiersgalla said. “Just because they say they are flushable doesn't mean they should flush them. They don't break down and it takes years to break down.”

The plumbing company and the city both agree on one simple solution.

“It's preventable. If people just didn't flush these down we wouldn't have the problem,” Pippenger said.

The City of Eau Claire says it is working with several area nursing homes to prevent more wipes from ending up in the system and they have already seen a small improvement.