



10844 Ellis Avenue
Fountain Valley, CA 92708
714.962.2411
www.ocsan.gov

March 21, 2022

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
The Honorable Lou Correa
The Honorable Katie Porter
The Honorable Michelle Steel
The Honorable Young Kim
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the Orange County Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of the Orange County Sanitation District (OC San), I write to express our support for the WIPPES Act (H.R. 4602) and the PIPES Act (H.R. 6591), sponsored by Representatives Alan Lowenthal and Lisa McClain, and request that you support both bills. These bipartisan bills take critical steps to holistically address the public health, environmental protection, and infrastructure issues associated with the flushing of single-use wet wipes.

OC San provides wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling for approximately 2.6 million people in central and northwest Orange County, CA. OC San's primary mission is to protect public health and the environment through its services. We urge Congress to pass the two bills to address the chronic issues public agencies face from the improper flushing of single-use wet wipes.

As the regional wastewater provider in north and central Orange County, we have firsthand knowledge of the unique treatment and management challenges and pollution threats to our water supplies. This includes the improper disposal of non-flushable wet wipes. In public wastewater systems, many of these products are composed of synthetic plastic fibers, and while some of these products are not marketed as flushable, they are frequently flushed as a means of disposal. Many of the wipes' packaging have hidden or do not contain how to safely dispose of the wipes. This adds to consumer confusion about proper disposal methods.

The WIPPES Act reasonably addresses the problem of non-flushable wipes, by establishing "Do Not Flush" labeling requirements for non-flushable wet wipes product packaging. These labeling requirements function as a source control solution by generating greater consumer awareness of proper disposal of these products and as a result, decrease the strains that the flushing of these products have on property owners, infrastructure, ratepayers, and the surrounding environment.

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In addition to non-flushable wipes, there are also wipes available to consumers today that are marketed as “flushable.” Despite the label, frequently these wipes are not actually “flushable” and do not disintegrate like toilet paper. After entering the sewer system, these “flushable” wipes do not fully break down as they travel through the system and demonstrate the same harmful characteristics of non-flushable wipes in wastewater infrastructure. These wipes tend to be particularly problematic for residential and neighborhood settings and regularly contribute to private sewer lateral backups and neighborhood sanitary sewer overflows.

The PIPES Act would address this unique problem in a straightforward approach, by codifying the International Water Services Flushability Group’s (IWSFG) code of practice (COP). The IWSFG COP is an internationally recognized specification for demonstrating that a non-woven product deteriorates appropriately, in a manner similar to toilet paper, once it enters a sewer system. The PIPES Act will ensure that wipes marketed as “flushable” are, in fact, truly flushable. Codifying and requiring manufacturers of these wipes to certify that their products are compliant with IWSFG’s certification specifications is a necessary consumer protection measure that will in turn relieve significant strain on public infrastructure to manage non-flushable debris.

Thank you for your continued efforts to address the water quality and infrastructure challenges facing the clean water sector. If OC San can be a resource for you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Jennifer Cabral, OC San Administration Manager at (714) 593-7581 or via email at JCabral@ocsan.gov should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



John B. Withers
Board Chairman