



March 3, 2020

The Honorable Bill Quirk, Chair
Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 171
Sacramento, California 95814

Subject: AB 818 (Bloom): Sponsor and Support

Dear Assembly Member Quirk:

The California Association of Sanitation Agencies is pleased to be co-sponsoring AB 818 (Bloom), which prescribes labeling requirements for non-flushable wet wipes products. AB 818 is a straightforward and important bill that seeks to provide clear consumer information about how we should properly dispose of single use wet wipes products, in order to keep non-flushable wipes out of the sewer system.

In the last 15 years, there has been a proliferation of single-use, wet wipe products onto the retail market. These convenience-driven, single-use products are available for a variety of applications including personal hygiene, household cleaning, baby and child care, and many other purposes. While most of these are intended to be disposed of in the trash can, there is a small suite of these products that are marketed as “flushable,” but look and feel the same as other non-flushable wipes. The lack of consistent messaging and product labeling for these products creates confusion about how to properly dispose of wipes, which results in many of these products being improperly flushed.

When wet wipes products are flushed they can cause significant issues for private property owners, sewer collection systems, and wastewater treatment plants. Wet wipes products are often made with plastic fibers which are incredibly durable. After being flushed they can catch on tree roots or other obstructions in residential sewer laterals and cause costly and dangerous backups for property owners. Further down the line, wet wipes weave together and form large “rags” that can become massive obstructions in sewer lines when they combine with other improperly flushed items such as fats, oils, and greases. These obstructions are commonly referred to as “fatburgs,” and in addition to being a disgusting environmental problem, local agencies spend significant time and resources to remediate these obstructions. In the worst cases, fatburgs result in sanitary sewer overflows, which are a threat to public health and the environment, and are subject to fines and penalties for public agencies.

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) reports that California wastewater utilities spend \$47 million annually on operations and maintenance (O&M) alone to manage wet wipes debris. In addition to the O&M figures, wastewater collection and treatment agencies have made significant investments in capital improvements to treatment infrastructure to install new equipment like “de-raggers,” bar screens, grinders, and upgraded pump systems. These upgrades are necessitated by the need to manage the volume of wipes coming through the system on a daily basis. Unfortunately, we anticipate that the capital costs, maintenance and education and outreach resources will grow as the popularity of these products continues to surge. It is also important to note that many single use wet wipes are made with plastic fibers. Those plastic fibers can shed off and contribute to microplastic pollution in the environment as noted in this recently released [research](#). CASA has long advocated that microplastic pollution is best managed through source control, by stopping plastic pollution from entering the wastewater stream in the first place.

While the impacts of wipes debris have long been a menacing problem for wastewater agencies, they were unfortunately exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic. Public health directives to sanitize surfaces with disinfecting wipes, coupled with a toilet paper shortage driving consumers to toilet paper

alternatives, led to a surge of wipes debris in the wastewater stream. These impacts were correlated directly with timing of the Governor's stay-at-home order. Some of our member agencies have reported that their pump systems have become completely inoperable, and they have seen significant increases in the volume of debris requiring removal. Agencies have also had to make adjustments in maintenance intervals to keep lines clean. Last March, the State Water Resources Control Board even issued a [public advisory](#) warning against flushing wet wipes. The U.S. EPA quickly followed suit with their own [advisory](#).

The wet wipes issue has long plagued the wastewater industry and we are pleased that AB 818 will provide real tangible progress toward better consumer information. The long and tedious negotiation process undertaken with industry and product stewardship advocates last Spring will ultimately result in California enacting the strongest in the nation labeling standards for non-flushable wipes products. We believe the agreement strikes a good balance of being aggressively environmentally protective, while providing necessary flexibility and consideration of manufacturing and commerce concerns. We would like to extend our gratitude to the Chair and staff of the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee for dedicating time and effort on this bill, and for recognizing the urgency for considering it during this year's legislative session.

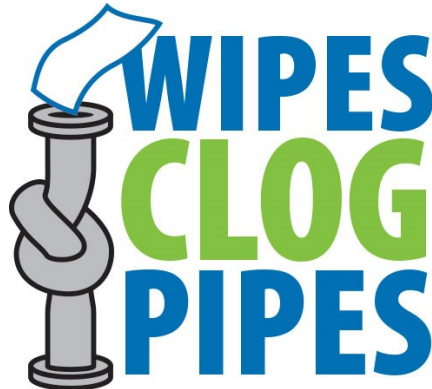
For the reasons described above, the California Association of Sanitation Agencies strongly supports AB 818 and urges your support when the bill is heard in the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee.

Sincerely,



Jessica Gauger
Director of Legislative Advocacy & Public Affairs

CC: Assembly Member Richard Bloom



For more information about wipes and our advocacy efforts on this issue, please visit www.casaweb.org/wipes