I FLUSHED. NOW WHAT?

Information about sewage pollution

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Department of Environmental Conservation

When you flush your toilet, where does waste go? What happens to water that goes down the drain after you wash dishes? In many communities, this water from homes and businesses (known as "wastewater" or "sewage") goes through a wastewater treatment system that treats (cleans) the water before it is returned to a local river, lake or ocean.

Sewage becomes pollution when it doesn't reach the treatment system

Most of the time, the treatment system and the pipes that carry wastewater from homes and businesses work fine. But sometimes the pipes that carry the waste break or the pipes are blocked and waste flows out onto streets and into waterways. These are known as "sewage spills".

Why should you care about sewage pollution? Sewage spills contain harmful bacteria that can cause illness.

DEC has always required wastewater treatment systems to report to the State when sewage spills occur. Recently a law was passed that requires the treatment systems to also provide the information to the public and neighboring municipalities. This information includes the location of the spill, when the spill occurred and how much sewage was spilled.

Sewage spills are reported through NY-Alert—a free, statewide public notification system. Sign up to receive sewage spill notifications directly to your phone, or via e-mail or text message by signing up for NY-Alert. Instructions for creating a NY-Alert account and setting it up to receive sewage spill alerts are available on DEC's website (see Online Resources).

Avoid contact with water impacted by sewage pollution.

- **Swim at regulated beaches.**
- **Don't swallow water while swimming.**
- **Don't swim in cloudy or discolored water.**
- **Wash your hands after swimming or fishing, especially before eating.**

KEY POINTS

Avoid contact with sewage pollution.

- Sewage spills are reported through NY-Alert
- Sign up to receive sewage spill alerts

You can help to prevent sewage spills

Don't dump fats, oils or grease down drains. Fats, oils and grease will build up and clog pipes, causing sewage to back up into homes. Running hot water and using soap while pouring fats, oil or grease down drains does not dissolve or break up the grease. Pour cooled fats, oils or grease into a can, wipe greasy pots and pans with a paper towel, and throw the can and paper towel in the trash.

Avoid flushing certain items. Don't flush baby wipes, "flushable" wipes, disposable diapers, or personal care products. Many dissolve slowly or not at all, and they can block pipes and damage wastewater treatment system equipment. Throw these items into the trash.

(Turn over for Quick NY-Alert Sign Up instructions and a list of online resources)

Quick and Easy NY-Alert Sign-up Instructions

New to NY-Alert? To sign up for a NY-Alert account:

1. Go to http://www.nyalert.gov/
2. Click on "Sign Up for *NY-Alerts*" in left navigation column.
3. Click the "Enroll" button.
4. Enter your information and click "Create Account."
5. Follow the directions from NY-Alert to confirm your account and set up your personal notification profile.
6. To set up your account to receive sewage spill alerts, follow the directions below.

Add sewage spill alerts to your account, if you already receive other alerts:

1. Sign into your NY-Alert account at http://www.nyalert.gov/.
2. Click the "Add Additional Alerts" button.
3. Click the "Customized Notification" button.
4. Select the "Environmental" warning category to receive for sewage spill alerts.

Step-by-step instructions for creating your NY-Alert account and setting up your account up to receive sewage spill alerts also are also available on DEC's website (see below for the link).

Online Resources

NY-Alert Sign-Up Instructions (http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/90315.html#spill): links to videos and printable instructions on how to sign up for a NY-Alert account and how to set up the account to receive sewage spill alerts.

Sewage Pollution Right to Know webpage (http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/90315.html): information about sewage and wastewater treatment systems.

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Wet Weather Advisory (http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/88736.html): information about CSOs and link to map with locations of CSO outfalls.

Swimming webpage (http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/96801.html): information and resources about safe swimming and safe water use.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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