



Responsible Flushing Alliance

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

#FlushSmart

CONSUMER EDUCATION CAMPAIGN



**DO NOT
FLUSH**

Presented by: Lara Wyss, RFA President

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February 2023



Dear Reader:

Educating consumers about the “Do Not Flush” symbol to help protect our environment and keep our communities healthy is the main priority of the Responsible Flushing Alliance (RFA). Over the past year, the RFA has undertaken multiple priorities in the state of California to educate consumers on proper flushing habits to reduce the number of items that don’t break up in our waste-water systems.

2022 was a productive year for RFA. We initiated our consumer education campaign – primarily focused on California audiences – and experienced a significant increase in industry and consumer interest. As a result, the Responsible Flushing Alliance has grown to 32 industry members, ranging from key players in the wipes manufacturing industry to partnerships with wastewater and public health stakeholder communities. And, after less than one year in the market, our consumer research indicates that consumers are beginning to notice, understand, and assimilate our message which is singularly aimed at reducing unwarranted clogs in our wastewater systems.

We continue working to ensure the “Do Not Flush” symbol is more widely recognized as we educate consumers on the importance of responsible flushing habits.

Our work in consumer education, engaging and facilitating conversations about flushing hygiene, and amplifying consumer and manufacturers guidelines of the Wet Wipes Labelling Law has already shown signs of positive impact in the state, and we are just getting started. We will continue growing the RFA’s voice by expanding our educational outreach and media campaign over the next year.

The following report highlights the RFA’s programming and the impact we made in 2022. We are tremendously proud of our work that is ultimately helping to protect our environment and keep our California communities healthy. Thank you for your ongoing support.

We’re excited for another successful year!

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lara M. Wyss".

Lara Wyss

President of the Responsible Flushing Alliance



OVERVIEW

Independent studies show that non-flushable items, which are not designed or intended to be flushed, make up 98-99 percent of materials that clog or accumulate in equipment at wastewater treatment plants. In October 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 818, known as the Wet Wipes Labelling Law, to help address this issue. The bill requires premoistened non-disposable wipes manufactured on or after July 1, 2022, to be labeled clearly with a “Do Not Flush” instruction in symbol and text and establishes the California Consumer Education and Outreach Program, which requires industry to study consumer behavior on the flushing of disposable wipes and establish relevant multimedia education and outreach programs. The mandates of the law included the following:

1. Comprehensive statewide consumer education and outreach campaign. Materials must be in both Spanish and English.
2. Multimedia campaign to promote consumer awareness with Do Not Flush symbol.
3. Participate in sewage collection study. *(An independent engineering firm, Kennedy Jenks, has been identified to manage the study, which is slated to begin in Summer 2023)*
4. Consumer opinion surveys assessing behaviors and awareness regarding disposal of non-flushable wipes - for 5 years to measure effectiveness.
5. Provide wastewater agencies with consumer education messaging for the symbol and label notice.
6. Report to the Senate Committee on an annual basis on campaign results; Submit written annual report for posting on the state website. *(This report is the intended fulfillment of this mandate.)*

CHALLENGE

While the “Do Not Flush” symbol has been included by many producers on packaging of non-flushable wipes for many years prior to the initial effective date of July 2022, few consumers understood what it meant. In Fall 2021, the RFA commissioned Drive Research to conduct an independent consumer survey to measure consumer awareness and understanding of proper household product disposal of common household products, including wet wipes.

Before the launch of our campaign, **69% of consumers in California recalled seeing the Do Not Flush symbol but only a third of respondents felt knowledgeable about which products were non-flushable.** Additionally, research indicated that, although half of respondents are aware that most sewer backups, blockages and clogs are caused by non-flushable items, many respondents self-reported still

In 2021, 69% of California consumers recognize the Do Not Flush Symbol. Only 1/3 of respondents felt knowledgeable about what products were non-flushable, and 60% reported having flushed a non-flushable.

routinely practicing unhealthy flushing habits, with **60% of consumers self-reporting to have flushed something non-flushable in the past year.** Those respondents cited a lack of education, “assuming the item(s) were flushable” or that they put little thought into the action.

2022 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Informed by this baseline research, RFA deployed a coordinated, digital-first “Do Not Flush” (DNF) label awareness campaign and launched consumer education initiatives in the state of California. Our goal was to **increase consumer familiarity with the symbol and inspire a change in flushing behaviors.**

We led a paid effort on social media, reaching **8.4M total impressions, 5.0% of which also engaged with our content, and 4.8% visited our website** throughout 2022, which was well over industry digital benchmark average of 1 - 2% for these channels. We also produced and disseminated an expansive inventory of educational materials to the public and our wastewater partners to reach more Californians. Additionally, we announced July 1st as an annually recognized FlushSmart Day, in accordance with a new resolution granted to RFA by California Assemblymember Richard Bloom, with a morning news show appearance to make the announcement that reached **6.1M+ viewers.**

Results of RFA's 2022 Initiatives:

As a result of our efforts in 2022, the #FlushSmart consumer education campaign was successful in driving awareness of the "Do Not Flush" symbol and in educating consumers on what not to flush.

A follow-up survey conducted in Fall 2022 found that familiarity with the Do Not Flush symbol **increased by 6 points to 75% of Californian consumers.** Additionally, **93% of respondents recognized the importance of this issue** to their own community, and 68% of consumers exposed to our campaign's messaging stated it was persuasive enough to change their behaviors.

2023 GOALS

In the coming year, the RFA will continue creating greater awareness of the "Do Not Flush" symbol in California in compliance with AB818 but also as a wider initiative to educate consumers on proper flushing habits. We will accomplish this by deploying a targeted, paid, earned, and owned media campaign to empower families to keep non-flushable products out of our community wastewater infrastructure.

In the following pages, you will see greater insights and impact of our 2022 campaign, led and accelerated by industry partners committed to public health, state infrastructure, and environmental wellbeing.

For any questions regarding information in this report, please contact RFA President Lara Wyss at lara@flushsmart.org or visit our website www.flushsmartcalifornia.org.

LAUNCHING THE #FLUSHSMART CAMPAIGN

The “Do Not Flush” (DNF) symbol is crucial to changing consumer habits surrounding the disposal of non-flushable wipes. In a market saturated with packaging symbols, we knew we needed a coordinated, culturally relevant and engaging campaign to ensure consumers were able to identify the DNF symbol and dispose of wipes products accordingly.

A yearly consumer research survey that the RFA commissions with Drive Research informs the #FlushSmart campaign strategy. Conducted in the fall of both 2021 and 2022, this survey continues to fulfill the requirement to assess consumer behavior and awareness of the proper disposal of non-flushable wipes. Each year, we incorporate research findings into an ever-evolving consumer strategy. We also have used this data to measure our progress in increasing consumer awareness of the DNF symbol - which increased by 6 percentage points in 2022. Learn more about these findings on page 14.

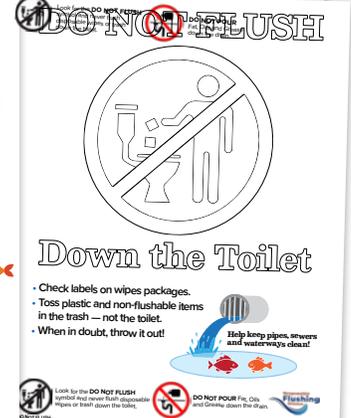
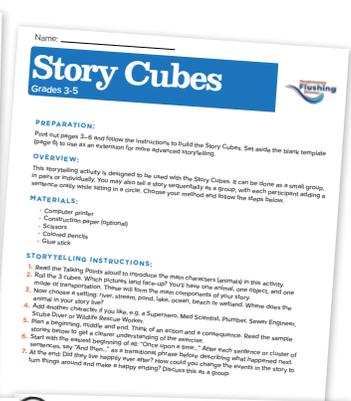
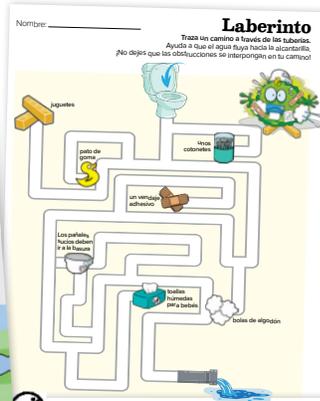
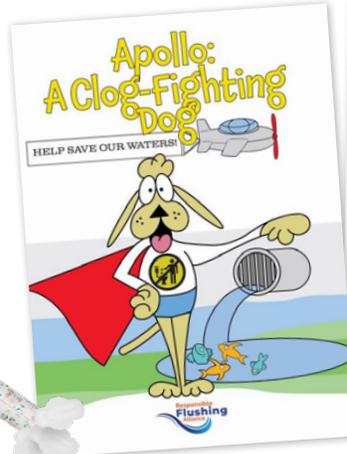
EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS PROVIDED IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH

As part of our comprehensive statewide consumer education and outreach campaign, we created content for audiences of all ages. From infographics on social media to activity books, RFA's educational materials, published in both Spanish and English, helped bring proper flushing habit information to people of all ages. In 2022, RFA worked with an educational expert to develop enrichment materials. These materials have been promoted across our channels and network. We have disseminated them to stakeholders within the wastewater space for use in their educational outreach. We also partnered with Discovery Cube, a scientific educational museum for kids, to provide our coloring books and FlushSmart activity pages in both English and Spanish to hand to visiting students.

Because of the success and widespread use of our many educational materials, RFA will partner with an educational organization to develop a full curriculum in 2023 for further flushing education. In 2022, RFA developed:

- ▶ 22 infographics
 - 8 lifestyle infographics
 - 7 educational infographics
 - 7 Spanish infographics
- ▶ 32 kid-friendly activity pages, delineated by school grade levels, with accompanying Spanish language versions
 - 4 | Pre-K activity pages
 - 10 | K-2nd grade activity pages
 - 9 | 3rd-5th grade activity pages
 - 1 | 6th-8th grade activity page
 - 8 activity pages for all ages
- ▶ 3 Clog Monster gifs
- ▶ 7 sharable social media tiles
- ▶ 6 educational videos

Promotion Plan: These educational materials were promoted and disseminated to targeted audiences through monthly newsletters, social media, press releases, and stakeholder engagement efforts with wastewater agencies across the state of California. Learn more on page 15.



Beyond these enrichment materials, our work continues to educate Californians and consumers nationwide through social media. Our digital-first approach to consumer education has allowed us to drive impact in the state of California, as well as reach a national audience, and create heightened awareness of the “Do Not Flush” symbol and proper flushing hygiene amongst target audiences. Through our social platforms, blogs, monthly infographics, and other owned content, we have been able to increase RFA’s profile as an outspoken and trusted industry voice on what not to flush education.

In recognition of RFA’s authority on the topic, President Lara Wys was asked to speak at conferences hosted by the California Association of Sanitation Agencies and the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. At these conferences, she shared how the “Do Not Flush” symbol, and RFA’s consumer education surrounding it, were making significant strides in changing consumer opinion and behavior around flushing habits in California. Materials were shared with participants at these conferences, equipping wastewater agencies around the country with new resources to amplify important messages about what not to flush.

Additionally, RFA’s website has played a critical role in driving consumer awareness. Our monthly blog posts and other website content generated 127,074 visits to the site, 167,524 sessions, and an average of 41 seconds of time spent on the site, which is in line with the industry benchmark of 42 seconds.

LEVERAGING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

RFA understands that changing consumer behavior is a big challenge. That's why we partnered with wastewater groups across California through our stakeholder engagement efforts. Together, we help ensure that wastewater agencies have access to consumer education messaging for the symbol and label notice. To date, we have **10 local wastewater groups we partner with directly, in addition to a standing partnership and collaboration with the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)**, to bolster consumer education messaging.

We also have established connections with Grades of Green, an environmental education group, and the Discovery Cube, a children's science museum in California. We provide these groups and other key stakeholders with access to our materials to ensure that important information about the symbol and the Wet Wipes Labelling Law are disseminated to as many audiences as possible. We provide regular updates to this information through our monthly newsletter. To date, we have 782 subscribers, a 33.6% open rate and an 3.4% click rate when we provide links to owned content. We also provide social media post templates that stakeholders can use to educate their own audiences across digital platforms.

In addition to these email newsletters, we host regular follow-up meetings with our wastewater groups to ensure that we're maximizing collaboration opportunities for RFA and respective agencies. Through these regular interactions, we have been able to work with the **Los Angeles County Sanitation District** to film a pump cleaning, which will be used in educational video content about how pipes can become clogged when filled with non-flushable substances.

To provide another example, RFA has worked with **Orange County and Roseville wastewater agencies** to develop a storyboard and script to further explain and provide guidance around which wipes to flush and how to prevent the fatbergs and sewage clogs created by wipes found without the DNF symbol. Additionally, we polled representatives from Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Francisco wastewater agencies to compile a list of "strangest things found in the sewers" for an infographic about responsible flushing and disposal habits.

10 WASTEWATER PARTNERS

East Bay Municipal
Utility District

Inland Empire Utilities Agency

Los Angeles Department
of Water & Power

Los Angeles County
Sanitation Districts

Monterey One Water

Orange County Sanitation
District

City of Roseville, California

City of Sacramento, California

City of San Diego, California

City of San Francisco, California



FLUSH SMART DAY

In accordance with the Wet Wipes Labelling Law, baby wipes, hard surface cleaning or sanitizing wipes and other wipes products that are not intended by the manufacturer to be flushable, were required to be clearly labeled as “Do Not Flush,” beginning July 1, 2022. In anticipation of the enactment of the law, RFA set out to claim July 1 as annual Flush Smart Day in California.

Through a direct, targeted promotion of the “Do Not Flush” symbol’s debut in this second phase of our 2022 campaign, we set forth to activate Flush Smart Day via a media launch event. This included consistent pitching to key media markets to increase awareness of the #FlushSmart campaign and its efforts to promote the “Do Not Flush” symbol. It also involved preparations to launch our statewide advertising campaign on Flush Smart Day, amplifying the DNF messaging to even more consumers and encouraging Californians to join us in observing July 1 as a day to promote responsible flushing habits.

As a result, we landed a morning show appearance on July 1 for RFA President Lara Wyss on Sacramento’s KCRA 3 News (which also aired on KSBW Channel 8 and MSN) to promote the symbol and the first observance of Flush Smart Day. The news hit garnered the following views and can be watched as a replay [HERE](#).

MORE THAN
6.1 million
NATIONAL VIEWS



MORE THAN
100,000
LOCAL VIEWS



Immediately following the morning news show appearance, Wyss was presented with a resolution to recognize July 1 as annual Flush Smart Day in California by Assembly Member Richard Bloom. The resolution received recognition in an article published by [H2O Global News](#) about Flush Smart Day and the media launch of the Do Not Flush symbol and #FlushSmart advertising campaign.

Flush Smart Day Media Engagement: By The Numbers

329

the number of media mentions in the month leading up to and including **Flush Smart Day**



602M

total readership of media that mentioned **Flush Smart Day**

167

the number of social media mentions in the month leading up to and including **Flush Smart Day**

163

the number of media mentions about the **"Do Not Flush"** symbol in context with RFA, the *#FlushSmart* campaign, or **Flush Smart Day**, in the months June and July 2022

652

total media mentions of **Do Not Flush** symbol in 2022



978

total media mentions of the **Responsible Flushing Alliance** in 2022

1.4B

total readership of media that mentioned the **"Do Not Flush"** symbol in 2022

1.5B

total readership of media that mentioned **RFA** in 2022

In addition to our media engagement strategy, we activated stakeholder outreach efforts to connect the RFA with wastewater and sanitation districts across California to partner in amplifying our messaging about the "Do Not Flush" symbol to their audiences.

These partnerships led to joint efforts to spread awareness of the issue around fatbergs and clogs damaging community wastewater treatment facilities, including obtaining photographs, video footage, and interviews with wastewater officials and public information officers. In advance of Flush Smart Day, we equipped our wastewater partners with messaging tool kits - provided to CASA, the National Stewardship Action Council, NACWA, other wastewater groups in California, and wastewater groups in Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Kentucky - inclusive of press release language, social media engagement guidance, talking points and more.

Traffic to our sites was up 6,500% in the month of July, thanks to the paid and organic efforts.

Flush Smart Day Stakeholder Engagement: By The Numbers

21

the number of organizations within our stakeholder network who posted about Flush Smart Day and the "Do Not Flush" symbol on their social channels



DO NOT FLUSH



31k

the number of clicks to our website we received from our paid amplification on **Flush Smart Day**

+820k

the number of impressions we received from our paid amplification on **Flush Smart Day**

896

total social media mentions on **Flush Smart Day**



4.4M

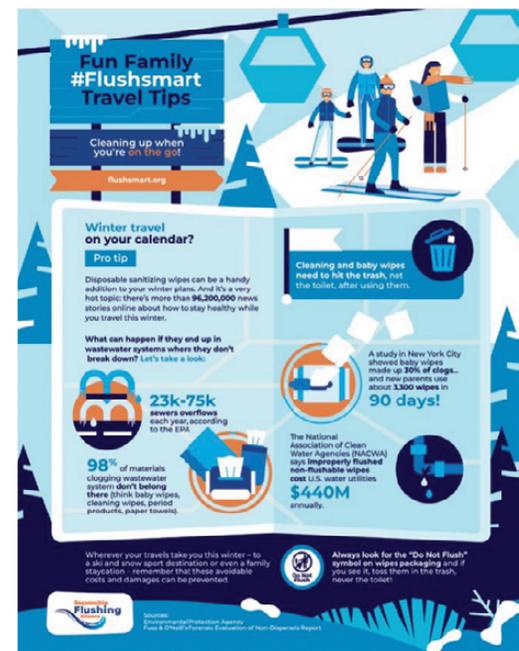
total social media impressions on **Flush Smart Day** (organic & paid)

CONTINUED MOMENTUM FOR "DO NOT FLUSH"

In the wake of Flush Smart Day, RFA continued its advertising campaign to saturate Californian audiences with important messaging about the DNF symbol and proper flushing habits. We continued media engagement via our regular press releases and pitching around relevant issues, as well as engaging our stakeholders to nourish further opportunities to collaborate on content amplification. We also continued to develop monthly educational materials, such as lifestyle infographics, blog posts, and newsletters to our audiences to share the news of our increasing impact.

Major publications took notice as well. For example, USA Today offered us a spot in their "Go Escape" travel magazine to highlight Flush Smart messaging and promote the "Do Not Flush" symbol. We took the opportunity to display a full-page ad sharing winter travel tips focused on what not to flush while on your family's snowy vacation. As a result, the ad reached 130 million of USA Today's readers and was promoted in a variety of other ways, including:

- ▶ USA TODAY featured the complete digital edition for 4 weeks on their official website, with approximately **130 million unique visitors monthly**.
- ▶ More than **10 million subscribers** were sent a link via email providing a complete digital edition of 2022 USA TODAY Go Escape.
- ▶ **Orbitz**, a leading online travel company, distributed the digital edition to over **5 million** opt-in subscribers.
- ▶ **Carnival Cruise Lines** distributed the digital edition via its various social media platforms, reaching over **5 million** opt-in subscribers.
- ▶ **Norwegian Cruise Line**, a leading global cruise company, promoted and distributed it across their various social media platforms reaching **4.7 million** opt-in subscribers, and via their newsletter, which reaches over **1 million** opt-in subscribers.
- ▶ **Wyndham Hotels & Resorts**, the largest hotel franchise company in the world, promoted it across their various social media platforms reaching over 300,000 opt-in subscribers, and via their **digital newsletter**, which boasts **millions of opt-in subscribers**.
- ▶ Frommer's, the travel guidebook experts, distributed the digital edition across its social media platforms, reaching over **350,000** opt-in subscribers.



By Fall 2022, we were able to reevaluate our impact with a follow-up survey of Californian consumers, showing us that our efforts had largely succeeded in improving both awareness of the "Do Not Flush" symbol, increasing connection with consumers on issues that matter to them, and spreading more persuasive messaging that alters consumer behavior in a positive direction.

By the end of the year, we accumulated the following results from our advertising campaign and organic efforts:

2022 BY THE NUMBERS

SOCIAL MEDIA + PRINT ADVERTISING: USA Today Travel Magazine stats

4.6M

total impressions (ad views) on Facebook

1.3M

total impressions (ad views) on Instagram

2.5M

total impressions (ad views) on Twitter

5%

average click through rate from social media to our website, showing well above average consumer interest when compared to industry benchmarks of 1-2%.

+8.4M

total social media impressions across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (organic & paid)

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

13 

featured media stories RFA had successfully pitched in 2022

652 

total media mentions of "Do Not Flush symbol" in 2022

978 

total media mentions of the Responsible Flushing Alliance in 2022

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

10

total California municipalities' wastewater and sanitation districts we've partnered with in 2022

872

total subscribers to our monthly newsletter

33.6%

average open rate of our monthly newsletter to stakeholders

3.4%

average click rate of our monthly newsletter to stakeholders

WEBSITE ANALYTICS:

127,074 

Total website visits in 2022

00:00:41 

Average time on page in 2022

127,000 

Total website visitors in 2022

124,040 

Number of visits from paid social campaign

167,524 

Total website sessions in 2022

APPENDIX

WHO IS RFA

The Responsible Flushing Alliance is an independent, nonprofit trade association committed to educating consumers about responsible and smart flushing habits to help reduce damage to municipal wastewater systems.

MISSION

Our mission is to contribute to real solutions from problems caused by inappropriately flushed products by working collaboratively with the wipes industry supply chain as well as the wastewater, scientific, engineering and operating entities to better understand and evaluate the scope, contents and impacts of flushed items on wastewater infrastructure.

We want to help spread knowledge regarding proper disposal practices of all disposable wipe products through prominent, on-package display of the “Do Not Flush” symbol, adherence to laws governing wipes labeling, and messaging to the public to always look for the “Do Not Flush” symbol on wipes packaging and if it is there, that wipe goes in the trash and never the toilet.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS

CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

- 3M
- Albaad Inc.
- ANDRITZ Group - Nonwoven Division
- Clorox
- DUDE Products
- Dukal, LLC.
- Ecolabs
- Eleeo Brands
- Essity
- First Quality
- GOJO
- Goodwipes
- Johnson & Johnson
- Kelheim Fibres GmbH
- Kimberly-Clark
- Nehemiah Manufacturing
- Nice-Pak and PDI
- Papel Aralar S.A.
- Procter & Gamble
- Reckitt
- Rockline Industries
- Sellars Nonwovens
- Spartan Chemical
- Suominen Corporation
- Unilever
- WaterWipes

ADVISORY MEMBERS

- California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)
- H2O Global News
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
- National Stewardship Action Council (NSAC)
- Toilet Board Coalition
- The Center for Baby & Adult Hygiene Products (BAHP)

GOALS

- ▶ Clear and prominent labeling of non-flushable items and the adoption of smart flushing habits are key to helping solve the problem of wipes accumulations or clogs in wastewater treatment systems. By providing education and resources to government agencies, wastewater groups, sanitation agencies, and other stakeholder groups, together we can arm consumers with the information they need to make smart flushing decisions.
- ▶ Changes to flushing behaviors will help free up consumer tax dollars and city resources that are now used to repair wastewater systems damaged by clogs.
- ▶ To provide factual information and data on the issue to counter the high level of misinformation communicated in the media.

Responsible
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