



Lanes
Group plc

Sinner or Binner? The Hidden Plastic Factfile

*The problem with **hidden plastic** and how we can all help to reduce **plastic pollution**.*

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**The problem
with plastic**

Plastic causes a wide range of environmental issues, especially when it is not disposed of correctly. Unlike other materials, such as paper, plastic is not **biodegradable**. That means it will not naturally be broken down by **microorganisms**.

If you buried a paper bag and a plastic bag in soil, the paper one would **decompose** within a few months - but the plastic one would remain intact for many years, causing damage to our environment.

Plastic is a manmade material that consists of many toxins, which have the potential to cause air, water and land pollution - creating problems for plants, wildlife, and humans.

The **toxic** chemicals that plastic releases can even make their way into the human bloodstream and have been linked to lots of medical conditions, such as cancer and birth defects.

What's more, animals sometimes get tangled in plastic and they mistake it for food, leading them to eat it or feed it to their offspring - risking their lives.

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In June 2018, a whale died in Thailand after eating 80 plastic bags

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It's important that **non-biodegradable** materials are disposed of correctly, which many of us do by recycling. At school and at home, you will use different coloured bins to dispose of different items such as plastic packaging, glass, food waste, and paper.

Recycling helps us reduce the amount of plastic that goes to landfill and into the sea. It also enables us to re-use the recycled materials, which also reduces the amount of energy that would be used to create new materials.

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Lots of companies are now making products out of recycled plastic as it is better for the environment

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However, unfortunately there is hidden plastic in lots of everyday items, which are not being disposed of correctly because people are not even aware that they contain plastic.

Glossary

Biodegradable - capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living microorganisms and thereby avoiding pollution

Microorganism - a microscopic organism, such as a bacterium, virus, or fungus

Decompose - make or become rotten; decay or cause to decay

Toxic - poisonous substances

Non-biodegradable - not capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms

Recycling - converting waste into a reusable material

Hidden plastics - a hidden danger



Recycling is a great way of making sure we correctly dispose of different materials and reduce the negative impact we have on the environment. But what if there were lots of everyday items that contained plastic that you didn't know about?

There are hidden plastics in lots of everyday products that leads people to not dispose of them correctly. Some people think that certain items can be recycled, but they can't because they contain hidden plastics, and some of them are incorrectly flushed down the toilet - making their way into our drains and sewers, causing significant damage.



Teabags

Most popular brands use a material called polypropylene, a sealing plastic, to help prevent tea bags from falling apart when they are used. So, even when they are put in the food waste bin or compost heap, not all of the tea bag will fully decompose.

Paper drinks cups

Although they are predominantly made of paper, disposable hot drinks cups handed out at your favourite cafes and coffee shops contain a plastic lining that helps to keep your drink warm. This prevents the cups from being able to be fully recycled.



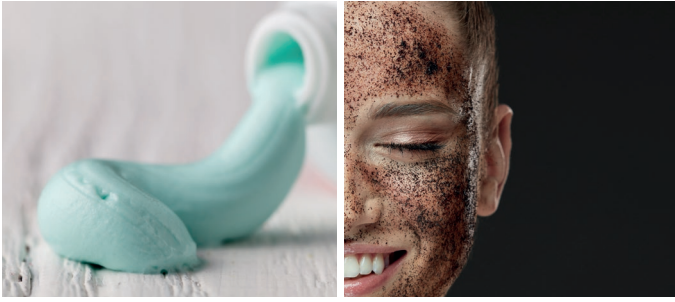
Chewing gum

Chewing on plastic doesn't sound very nice, does it? But lots of popular chewing gums contain tiny plastic particles. The 'gum base' written on the packet often contains polyethylene, which is used to make plastic bottles and plastic bags, or polyisobutylene, which is a rubber used to make tyre inner tubes.

Condoms

Most condoms are made from latex, which is a type of plastic, but some of them are still labelled as being flushable when they are not. Even latex-free condoms contain a different plastic, most commonly polyurethane.





Face scrubs and toothpaste

Lots of popular face scrubs used to include plastic 'microbeads', which did not decompose when they were washed down drains, but a law came into place on 19th June 2018 that banned companies from selling any products containing microbeads.

Wet wipes

Plastic is woven into wet wipes to make them more durable - but this also makes them non-biodegradable. There are lots of different wet wipes available, such as antibacterial and baby wipes, and many of them are incorrectly labelled as flushable.



Sanitary products

Hidden plastic is also woven into lots of the most popular tampon and sanitary towel brands, also to make them more durable. Because of the plastic inside these products, they will not fully decompose when they are put in the bin. What makes things worse is that lots of people wrongly flush them down the toilet.

Cotton buds

Although the tips of cotton buds are biodegradable, they are often attached (with plastic-based glue) to non-biodegradable plastic sticks.



Nappies

Similarly to sanitary towels and tampons, nappies contain hidden plastics to make them more absorbent and durable. Because of this, they are not biodegradable and can actually take 500 years just to start to break down.

In recent years, the public has become more aware of plastic pollution and has supported lots of different campaigns to reduce the overuse of plastic. This has resulted in changes being made to laws, such as the ban on **microbeads**, as well as the 5p charge for plastic bags, which came into effect on 5th October 2015. Lots of members of the public are now campaigning to ban wet wipes as well as plastic-stemmed cotton buds. Despite this, lots of people up and down the country wrongly flush hidden plastics down the toilet every day without thinking about what happens to them when they reach our sewers...

Glossary

Microbeads - extremely small pieces of plastic, used especially in cleansing products

The damage plastic causes



The hidden plastics that get flushed down the toilet have a negative effect on our environment. As plastic is not **biodegradable**, it does not **decompose** in our sewers.

When hidden plastics are flushed down the toilet, they get stuck in fatbergs - congealed masses of fat, oil and grease (FOG) that has been wrongly poured down kitchen sinks. Fatbergs start small and get bigger as non-biodegradable items including wet wipes, cotton buds, condoms, tampons and sanitary towels get lodged in them.

Wet wipes are one of the biggest concerns, as many manufacturers label them as flushable, leading people to believe that they are - when in fact they are not. They make up around 93% of the material in sewer blockages and are estimated to cause around 300,000 blockages every year, at a cost of £100 million to the country.

In April 2018, [Thames 21](#) - an organisation that works with communities to look after London's waterways, found more than 5,000 wet wipes in one small area of the Thames riverbed. It was the highest number of wipes to be found in a single place in the UK.

As they grow, fatbergs block our drains and sewers and have to be removed, often by hand, by people like us at Lanes for Drains, to ensure that dirty wastewater does not leak from our sewers and **contaminate** our streets and homes.

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We recently found a fatberg underground in London that was 250 metres long - the length of 11 double-decker buses or two Wembley football pitches!

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Even if these plastics don't get stuck in a fatberg, they make their way to our oceans, where they disintegrate into smaller pieces - microplastics - and cause a multitude of problems.

Microplastics are ingested by fish, birds, and other marine life that mistake the plastics for food, which often has fatal effects. Humans can also consume microplastics when eating seafood or drinking tap water.

Glossary

Biodegradable - capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms and thereby avoiding pollution

Decompose - make or become rotten; decay or cause to decay

Contaminate - make something impure by exposure to or addition of a poisonous or polluting substance

Microplastics - extremely small pieces of plastic debris resulting from the disposal and breakdown of consumer products and industrial waste



**Are you a sinner
or a binner?**

The team at Lanes Group sees first hand the impact that hidden plastics have on our sewers and our environment, which is why we are passionate about raising awareness of hidden plastics and reducing the negative impact that they have.



Wet wipes contribute to 93% of the material in sewer blockages in the UK



There are 8 million tonnes of plastic dumped in the ocean every year and sanitary products are one of the biggest contributors to plastic pollution.

Because of this, we want to educate people on the correct ways to dispose of sanitary products and how everyone can help minimise **plastic pollution**.



One sanitary towel contains as much plastic as four carrier bags. Around seven billion plastic tampon applicators are disposed of every year



As we mentioned earlier, most popular sanitary products have hidden plastic woven into their fabric, making them **non-biodegradable**, so the correct way to dispose of them is in the bin.

Lanes Group recently asked the public about the types of items they flush down the toilet, and 31% of people who took part admitted to flushing wet wipes.

Additionally, 80% of men that took the survey said that they knew that condoms should be disposed of in the bin, but 10% of them admitted to flushing a condom down the toilet in the last year.

Another survey Lanes Group conducted found that as many as 20 million women in the UK have flushed at least one sanitary product down the toilet in their lifetime.

In the UK alone, litter pickers are collecting up to six pieces of sanitary waste for every 100 metres of beach, which across the entire coastline equates to 2 million items.

No matter what the reasons are for flushing products containing hidden plastics, it is everyone's responsibility to educate and encourage people to be a binner, not a sinner!

Glossary

Plastic pollution - the accumulation of plastic products in the environment that adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat and humans

Non-biodegradable - not capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms

How you can help ¹

1 Be a binner, not a sinner - Be constantly mindful that lots of everyday items contain plastic - wet wipes, condoms, cotton buds and sanitary products should always be disposed of in the bin!

2 Ban the wet wipe! - If you or your family are guilty of flushing wet wipes, why not impose a ban to help reduce your impact on the environment?

3 Consider eco-friendly alternatives - Females use around 11,000 disposable menstrual products throughout their lifetime, which, if not disposed of correctly will have a significant negative impact on the environment. Consider swapping from your usual non-biodegradable product to an eco-friendly alternative, such as a menstrual cup, plastic-free cotton tampons and sanitary pads, or washable period pants.

4 Spread the message - As we mentioned earlier, it is everyone's responsibility to help protect our sewers, oceans and environment. So share your new found knowledge of hidden plastics with your friends and family, and encourage them to also be a binner, not a sinner!





Lanes Group is the UK's largest independent drainage contractor with three branded companies and several operating divisions across the UK.

Our services include:

- **Drain and sewer cleaning**
- **Drain and sewer inspection**
- **Drain and sewer repair**
- **Drain and sewer relining**
- **CCTV surveying**
- **Septic tank installation & cleaning**
- **Home buyers drain surveys**

For more information, visit www.lanesfordrains.co.uk or call us on 0800 526 488.