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Reps. McClain, Lowenthal Introduce Bipartisan PIPES Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Lisa McClain (R-MI) and Congressman Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) introduced the Protecting Infrastructure and Promoting Environmental Stewardship (PIPES) Act, which would require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish standards for the flushability of disposable wipes and would impose civil penalties on companies who are knowingly incompliant with these standards.

“The PIPES Act would help clear years’ worth of damage to our sewage systems made by wipes that have caused massive clogs that can’t be easily removed,” said Rep. Lisa McClain. “Thank you to Congressman Lowenthal, the American Public Works Association, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA), the National Rural Water Association, Macomb County Public Works, the Charleston Water System, the Michigan Municipal League, American Rivers, the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association, Ocean Conservancy and the National Association of Water Companies for their support of this crucial piece of legislation.”

“The problem of flushed wet wipes has created tremendous problems for our water infrastructure for many years and is just one facet of our growing plastics waste pollution crisis,” Congressman Lowenthal said. “The PIPES Act would provide consumers with a flushability
standard and the information they need to properly dispose of these wipes, and in doing so protect our water infrastructure and our environment.”

“This is extremely important legislation to help us all protect our critical underground infrastructure. Packaging on all wipes should clearly say “Do Not Flush.” They may be flushable but they are not biodegradable and these wipes are wreaking havoc on our sewers,” Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice S. Miller said.

“NACWA applauds Representatives Lisa McClain (MI-10) and Alan Lowenthal (CA-47) for introducing the Protecting Infrastructure and Promoting Environmental Stewardship Act (PIPES Act). If enacted, the bill would require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish standards for the flushability of disposable nonwoven products – commonly known as wet wipes. The bill would ensure that these products, when marketed as “flushable” or “sewer and septic safe”, do in fact travel through and break down in wastewater systems without causing harm to plumbing, sewers, or the environment,” CEO of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies Adam Krantz said. “For far too long, clean water agencies and their workers have dealt with the clogs, strained and damaged equipment, and extra costs and dangers associated with wipes that are flushed but do not break down as advertised. And clean water utility ratepayers have paid the literal price for these mislabeled products through higher rates to address the sewer system damage they cause. Many wipes on the market today that are labeled as “flushable” are prone to getting stuck in plumbing, forming clogs in sewer lines, and causing mechanical failures for utilities. Yet consumers are misled to believe that they are appropriate for disposal down the toilet. This commonsense bill would allow shoppers to make informed choices and would protect property owners, public utilities, ratepayers and the environment. NACWA looks forward to working with Congress to advance this timely legislation to protect clean water infrastructure.”

“On behalf of the American Public Works Association (APWA), I thank Representatives McClain and Lowenthal for introducing this important, bipartisan legislation. Disposable nonwoven products can cause significant damage to the critical water infrastructure our members operate and maintain, and directing EPA to establish clear, enforceable standards for flushability will reduce the costs imposed on our communities,” said APWA CEO Scott D. Grayson, CAE.

“CASA applauds Representatives Lisa McClain and Alan Lowenthal for introducing the PIPES Act,” Executive Director of the California Association of Sanitation Agencies Adam Link said. “This bipartisan legislation addresses a problem that has plagued local clean water agencies' efforts to effectively manage collection systems and improve water quality for years. By codifying the International Water Services Flushability Group’s code of practice, the PIPES Act will ensure that wet wipes marketed as “flushable” are truly flushable. This bipartisan legislation will ensure truthful marketing practices while protecting the nation’s clean water infrastructure and public health.”

“I commend Congresswoman McClain for introducing this legislation – which is both necessary and appropriate to protect public sewer systems from costly repairs, unnecessary maintenance, and sewer overflows caused by non-flushable wipes. Kimberly-Clark recently demonstrated industry leadership and environmental responsibility when it agreed to meet the substantive
performance standards and labeling requirements in this legislation by May 1, 2022. It is time to force the rest of the wipes manufacturers and retailers – who have been dragging their feet - to meet the same environmental standards. I urge Congresswoman McClain’s colleagues to pass this legislation expeditiously”, said Paul Calamita, a national municipal attorney who also is leading the Charleston Water System’s class action lawsuit against manufacturers and retailers of flushable wipes.

“Flushed wipes are wreaking havoc on our nation’s wastewater facilities. Once flushed, rather than dissolving, nonwoven wipes end up as clogs that can weigh hundreds of pounds, blocking sewer pumps and pipes, jeopardizing worker safety, and costing utilities millions of dollars annually. NRWA fully supports Congresswoman McClain’s legislation which would dramatically reduce the negative consequences of improper labeling and disposal,” said CEO of National Rural Water Association Matt Holmes.

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