

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



#FlushSmart
Consumer Education Campaign

Table of Contents

President’s Letter 3

Overview 4

- ▶ Challenge 4
- ▶ Results of RFA’s 2023 Initiatives 5

2023 By the Numbers 6

2024 Goals 8

Educational Materials 9

Participated in a Collection Study 12

Flush Smart Day Highlights 14

Digital Media Strategy 17

Earned Media Outreach 19

Appendix 20

President's Letter

Dear Reader:

The Responsible Flushing Alliance (RFA)'s main priority is educating consumers about the "Do Not Flush" symbol to help protect our environment and keep our communities healthy. Over the past year, the RFA has reached millions of consumers, in California and beyond, raising awareness, and educating them about proper flushing habits. We are confident our efforts are critical to reducing the number of non-flushable items that plague our wastewater systems, particularly baby wipes, cleaning wipes, makeup wipes, and more.

In 2023, we brought the message of our consumer education campaign to multiple industry conferences, from the World of Wipes Conference to the Smart Water Utilities USA Conference. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and supportive, and our industry peers agree: #FlushSmart is an important player in the effort to protect our wastewater systems, environment, and communities.

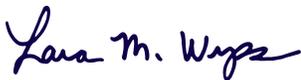
Our coalition work has continued to pay off, and we are proud to be partnering with 36 industry members, ranging from key players in the wipes manufacturing industry to partnerships with wastewater and public health stakeholder communities. Our consumer research continues to show an increase in flushing awareness, with **90% of respondents indicating that they are at least somewhat knowledgeable about what can be flushed safely.** Thus, 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. And while 2023 saw great success, we know there is still work to be done.

On Flush Smart Day (July 1, 2023), we garnered participation from 70 wastewater groups to publish our #FlushSmart messaging across social media. Our coordinated efforts produced unified messaging, widening our reach across the state by targeting local regions where our wastewater and sanitation agencies serve. When comparing this year's collaborations with 2022, we noticed a 65% increase in posts shared by wastewater agencies that aligned with our messaging on and around Flush Smart Day, proving we are achieving greater resonance within our industry.

We also discovered new ways of reaching consumers this year. Our TikTok campaigns garnered **more than 11 million impressions!** The most viewed video was our movie trailer-style PSA telling the "villain origin story" of Clog Monster and why you should never flush a non-flushable wipe down the toilet. Throughout the year, we used the Clog Monster as a primary vehicle for promoting the "Do Not Flush" symbol, even starting a Twitter account for our "lovable villain" to use his snarky humor to give RFA opportunities to respond with more #FlushSmart messaging.

The RFA has so many opportunities ahead in 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 2023. 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 hope it continues in 2024.

Regards,



Lara Wyss
President, Responsible Flushing Alliance

Overview

Independent studies show that non-flushable items, which are not designed or intended to be flushed, make up 99 percent of materials that clog or accumulate in equipment at wastewater treatment plants. In October 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 818, now known as the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, to help address this issue. The bill requires premoistened non-flushable 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 the 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 the “Do Not Flush” symbol.
3. Participate in a sewage collection study.
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 and Assembly Committees on an annual basis on campaign results; submit a written annual report for posting on the state Water Board website. (This report is the intended fulfillment of this mandate.)

CHALLENGE

While many producers have implemented the “Do Not Flush” symbol onto the packaging of non-flushable wipes before the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, we knew education was needed for consumers to notice and understand the symbol’s meaning. From 2021-2023, the RFA commissioned marketing research firm Drive Research to conduct an annual independent consumer survey, measuring consumer awareness and understanding of the disposal of common household products, including non-flushable 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.** Research indicated that, although half of the respondents were aware that most sewer backups, blockages, and clogs are caused by non-flushable items, **60% of consumers self-reported having 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.

RFA sought to meet the consumer need for education and awareness. Our 2022 campaign kickstarted our #FlushSmart content and resources. The details and success of that campaign can be found in our [2022 Annual Report](#). While 2022 was successful, we had only begun to scratch the surface of poor flushing habits.

In 2023, we adapted to the shift in overall media consumption - user-generated, short-form video content rose to popularity online - to ensure our target audiences were interacting with our important message. We also connected with consumers in ways that would capture their attention. We needed #FlushSmart to break onto the scene to create cultural relevancy, and answer “why” questions with what mattered most to consumers - namely, the impact improper flushing can have on personal finances, home health, and environmental well-being.

RESULTS OF RFA'S 2023 INITIATIVES:

The 2023 #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 2023 found that familiarity with the “Do Not Flush” symbol increased by 3 points to 79% of Californian consumers. Additionally, 78% of respondents recognized the importance of this issue to their community, and 91% of our target audiences indicated that seeing our messaging would likely change their flushing habits.

OUR MANDATE FOR 2023:
Meet consumers where they are, engaging them through culturally relevant content on the issues that matter most to them: personal finance, home health, and environmental well-being.

2023 By the Numbers

SOCIAL MEDIA + PRINT ADVERTISING:

f 6.6M+

total impressions (ad views) on Facebook

ig 3.5M+

total impressions (ad views) on Instagram

x 7.5M+

total impressions (ad views) on Twitter

tt 11.4M+

total impressions (ad views) on TikTok

30.7M

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

0.5%

average click-through rate from social media to our website

USA Today
GoEscape
2 million
print readers

Vanity Fair
8.1 million
print readers

US Weekly
1.95 million
print readers

12M+ PRINT READERS



MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

11

featured media stories RFA had successfully pitched in 2023



2,877

total media mentions of "Do Not Flush symbol" in 2023



2,918

2,918 total media mentions of the Responsible Flushing Alliance in 2023

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

19

California municipalities' wastewater and sanitation districts partnered within 2023

26%

average open rate of our monthly newsletter to stakeholders

759

total subscribers to our monthly newsletter

4.7%

average click rate of our monthly newsletter to stakeholders



WEBSITE ANALYTICS:

102,285 

Total website visits in 2023

103,259 

Total website visitors in 2023

00:01:02 

Average time on page in 2023

71,336 

Total unique website visitors in 2023

59,602 

Number of visits from paid social campaign

120,784 

Total website sessions in 2023



Flush Smart Day By the Numbers

65%

Increase in aligned messaging from industry partners across platforms (compared to 2022)

70

Stakeholder Posts

6.4M+

Views on TikTok Trailer

1.6M+

Social Media Impressions

370+

Media Mentions

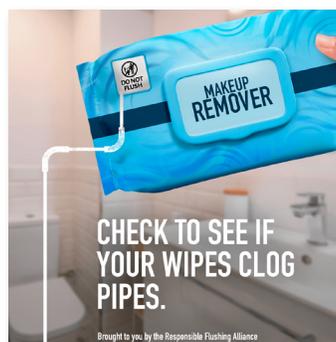
Educational Materials

RFA created evergreen content throughout 2023 for audiences of all ages. From infographics to activity books, RFA's educational materials are free and downloadable from our website at flushsmart.org and flushsmartcalifornia.org. These materials have been promoted across the RFA channels and network. We have also disseminated them to stakeholders within the wastewater space for use in their educational outreach.

RFA also established connections with Grades of Green, an environmental education group, and the Youth Cinema Project, a student enrichment group. We provided these groups and other key stakeholders with access to our materials, ensuring that essential information about the symbol and the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law was disseminated to as many audiences as possible. In partnership with Grades of Green, we published an [English and Spanish](#) language toolkit about responsible flushing habits. Working with the Youth Cinema Project, RFA began planning a creative film competition where students will create short films about the "Do Not Flush" symbol and how to keep smart flushing habits at home and beyond.

In 2023, RFA developed:

- 2 educational Flush Smart toolkits
- 9 Videos
- 23 Do Not Flush Wipes Infographics & Clog Monster Movie Posters



WASTEWATER PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the year, wastewater agencies played a critical role in broadening the reach of RFA's creative and messaging campaigns. We met regularly with **20 wastewater groups** to coordinate messaging, launch coordinated social media interactions, and conduct critical collection studies.

As we do every year, we invited these wastewater partners and more (including media, industry peers, RFA members, and other public health officials) to our **Annual Meeting**, where we presented our campaign plan and strategy for 2023. The meeting took place in March and answered questions on how we can partner together to spread #FlushSmart consumer education.

In April, we furthered the reach for our PSA-style graphics by delivering them to our California wastewater agency partners just in time for Earth Day. We equipped these partners to promote the graphics to their audiences by drafting a comprehensive communication plan and toolkit, including helpful talking points, data points, social media best practices, sample social posts, and more.



During Flush Smart Day, we collaborated with organizations from wipes manufacturers to public health organizations, **including NSAC, INDA, Nonwovens Industry, Spartan Chemical, First Quality, the Toilet Board Coalition, and various local/regional wastewater agencies**, to name a few. RFA provided creative messaging and social media guidance to deploy on Flush Smart Day. As a result of our stakeholder engagement, we collected **70 posts from various partners in amplification of #FlushSmart messaging and bringing awareness to the “Do Not Flush” symbol.**

We also provide updates to our wastewater partners through our monthly newsletter. To date, we have sent **11,106 newsletters to 759 subscribers and achieved a 26% open rate along with a 4.7% click rate** when we provide links to owned content. We also regularly provide social media post templates that stakeholders can use to educate their audiences across digital platforms.

Finally, we host regular follow-up meetings with our wastewater groups to ensure that we are maximizing collaboration opportunities for RFA and respective agencies.

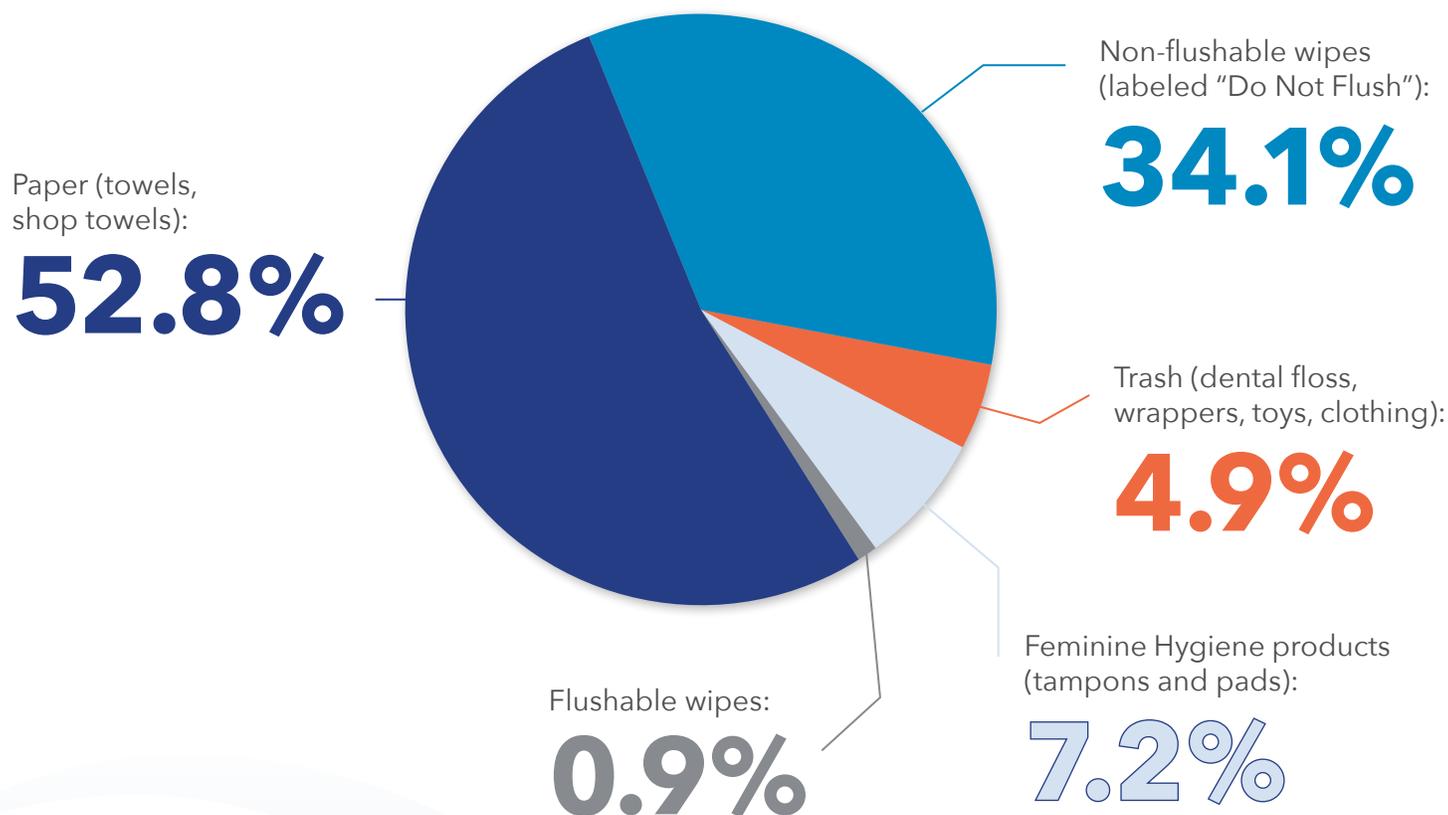


Participated in a Collection Study

As part of our mission, and following the Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, we also conducted two dry season local collection studies in partnership with the California Association Sanitation Agencies (CASA), the Inland Empire Utilities Agency, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, and INDA (Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry). Kennedy-Jenks, an independent engineering firm, was hired to design the collection study and compile the findings in a comprehensive report. Study parameters included pulling raw sewage samples from the bar screens at the headworks during peak flow times. Analysis of the items spanned four days of sorting and identifying 1,745 items, making it the largest collection conducted in the U.S.

After samples were carefully recovered, they were cleaned and all articles larger than 1 inch in any direction were identified using a reference folder of approximately 150 nonwoven wipes, purchased from supermarkets, big box retailers, drug and convenience stores, and online sites. Additional categories included paper products, feminine hygiene items, and trash.

The results were surprising to wastewater operators but fairly consistent with what has been found in other collection studies in other parts of the U.S. and abroad.



Most non-flushable wipes were recovered whole and intact. A large portion of the paper towel samples were also substantial in size and intact. However, the flushable wipes samples were hard to find, generally much smaller and in the process of breaking apart. They were delicate to handle unlike the other wipes samples and paper towels.



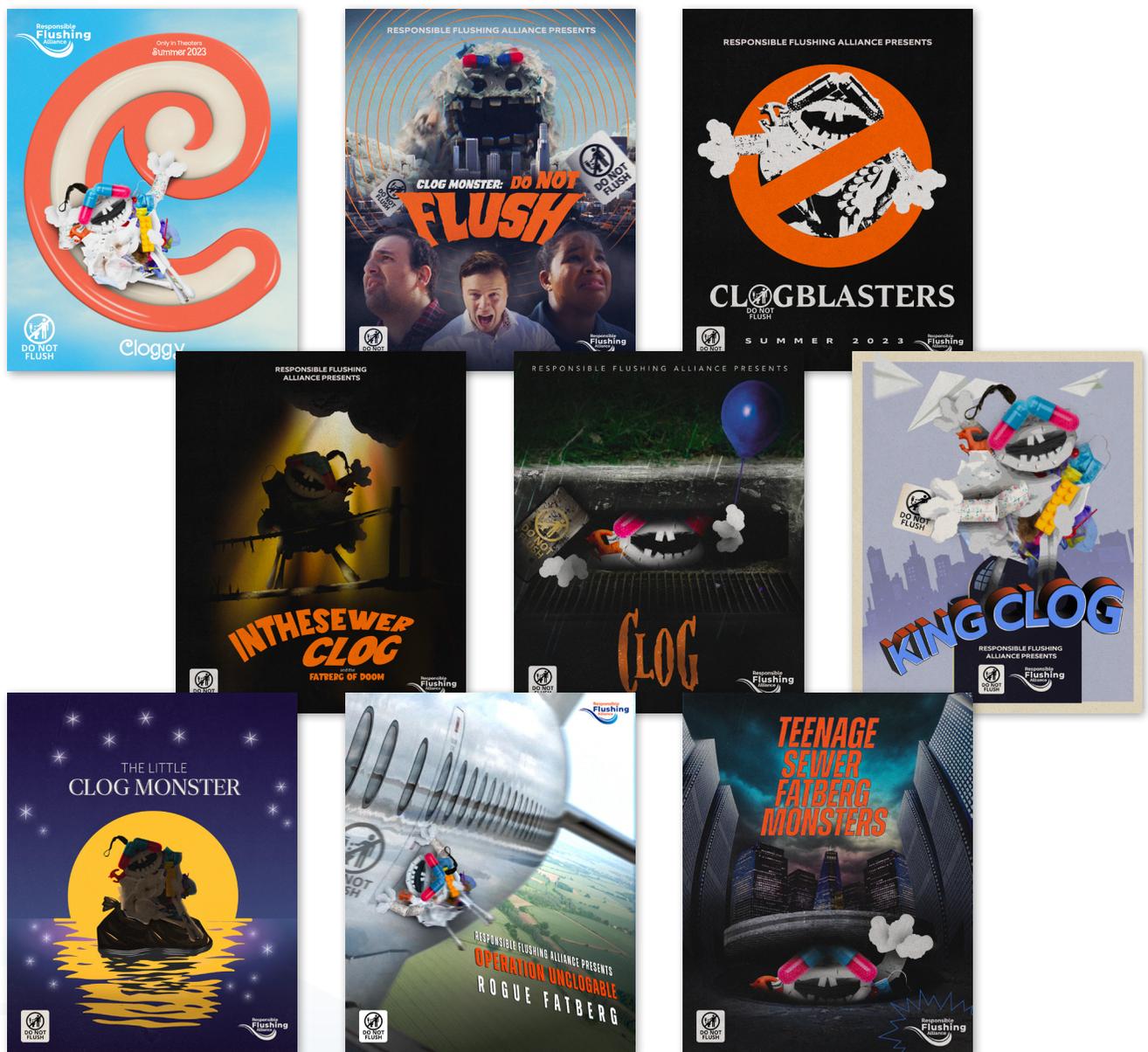
To bring attention to the results of the collection study and provide education on what not to flush, RFA designed a **Wipes 101 infographic** in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). The infographic helps consumers understand what they should stop flushing down the toilet and emphasizes the importance of looking for the “Do Not Flush” symbol and reading disposal instructions.



Flush Smart Day Highlights

On July 1, 2023, we celebrated the second annual Flush Smart Day. Instituted in 2022 with the enactment of California's Proper Wet Wipes Labeling Law, Flush Smart Day furthers the mission of the #FlushSmart consumer education campaign by reminding consumers to look for the "Do Not Flush" symbol on wipes packaging.

Capturing the attention of consumers requires creativity that can cut through the noise of traditional brand-to-consumer content. The concept behind this year's Flush Smart Day campaign centered around the Californian culture of entertainment. Inspired by cult classic films and recent blockbusters, we produced [9 movie posters](#) to distribute across RFA's organic platforms, activating the nostalgia and excitement of entertainment lovers across the state.

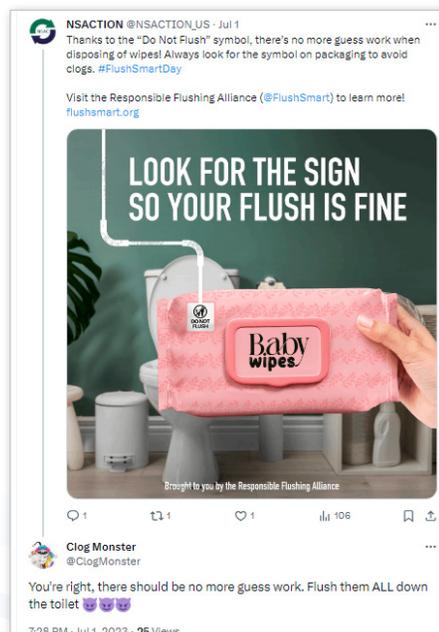


Our campaign culminates around the launch of our [Flush Smart Day movie trailer, a 2-minute video](#) designed to grab consumer attention and tell Clog Monster’s “villain origin story.” The trailer was amplified before the premiere via **two teaser trailers (HERE and HERE)**, and a **shortened trailer** optimized for paid amplification.



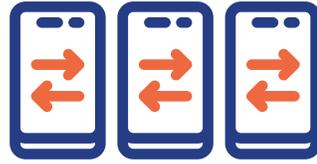
As mentioned before, we worked with our wastewater partners and networks to disseminate Flush Smart Day messaging and toolkits and enable them to further the reach of the #FlushSmart campaign to their social media followers. By Flush Smart Day, we found most posts shared by these partners were closely aligned with RFA-provided messaging and many included our wipes PSA graphics. Specifically, **70 different industry partners participated in Flush Smart Day** across social media, resulting in a **65% increase in RFA-aligned messaging** compared to Flush Smart Day messaging in 2022.

To further increase community awareness of the Clog Monster, we worked with two agencies, LA County Sanitation Districts, and the National Stewardship Action Council, to pre-plan lighthearted Twitter exchanges on Flush Smart Day between their accounts and Clog Monster’s new Twitter account. Clog Monster replied with witty tweets to appeal to RFA’s younger target audience.



Flush Smart Day By the Numbers

65%



INCREASE IN ALIGNED MESSAGING FROM INDUSTRY PARTNERS ACROSS PLATFORMS (COMPARED TO 2022)

 6.4M+

VIEWS ON TikTok TRAILER

70 

STAKEHOLDER POSTS



1.6M+

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS



370+

MEDIA MENTIONS

While Flush Smart Day served as our star moment in 2023, we continued to pursue consumer education efforts across multiple mediums, including organic and paid digital, earned media, wastewater partnerships, and the development of educational materials for our website.

These efforts are further detailed in the report below.

Digital Media Strategy

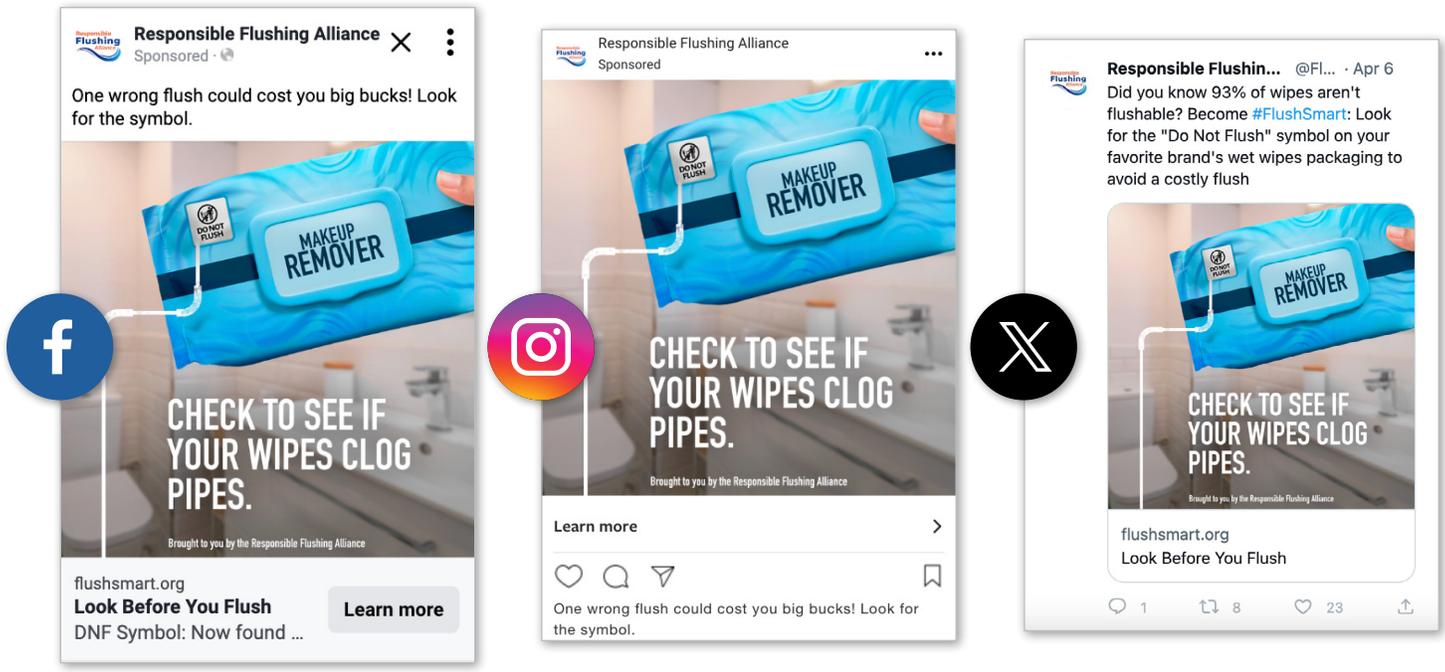
We further developed the Clog Monster character as a unique vehicle for warning consumers about why flushing non-flushable wipes is hazardous to their homes, community, and environment. Through Clog Monster's own [Twitter handle](#) and curated responses to the official RFA social channels, he became a snarky yet harmless reminder to people of all ages to *not* flush their non-flushable wipes.

Grabbing Consumer Attention with Unique, Infotainment Style Creative Content



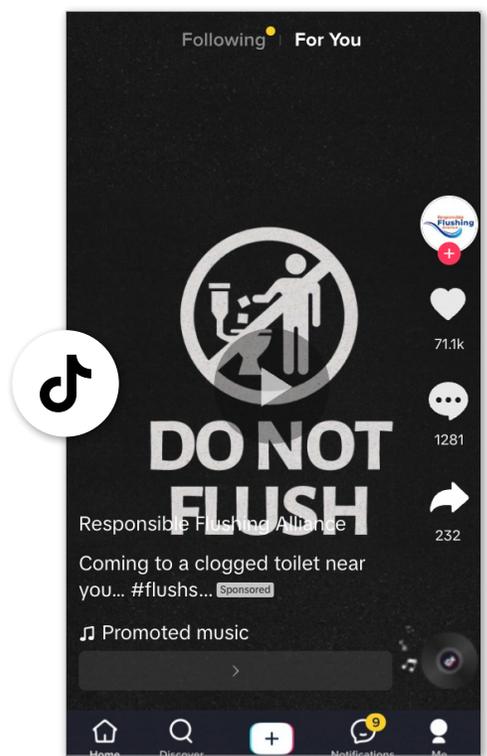
As a part of our Flush Smart Day integrated approach, RFA released a series of paid advertising content across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok.

Our social media advertisements first used PSA-style graphics featuring the “Do Not Flush” symbol and various genericized product packaging to point out where consumers may find the symbol when using their common household wipes products. Running an on-and-off campaign at strategic moments throughout Q1-Q2, these ads collectively generated 6.9M impressions and 58.2K clicks. Our top-performing ad from each platform can be seen below.



For Flush Smart Day, we focused our digital advertising on our original Clog Monster movie trailer. We promoted various cutdowns of the movie trailer to capture consumer attention through entertainment. These ran from July 1 - July 19 and resulted in 1.5M video views, 6.4M impressions, and 29.7K clicks.

Collectively in 2023, our paid performance showed strong results right away and ultimately generated **30.7 million impressions, 167.1k clicks, and 12.4M video views.**



Earned Media Outreach

RFA collaborated with two home and lifestyle creators, [Porsha Carr Blog](#) and [Luci's Morsels](#), to craft blog posts and accompanying social content encouraging their readers and followers to look out for the “Do Not Flush” symbol on wipes packaging. These blogs primarily cater to parents of young children across California – a key demographic for RFA. By working with these creators, we harnessed a new and innovative way to reach consumers and promote #FlushSmart habits.

Porsha Carr produced a blog post and Instagram content, which reached a total of **8,158 accounts**, with a **41% engagement rate**. Luci's Morsel created content for her blog and Instagram, which was also shared on her Facebook and Pinterest accounts. In total, Luci's content reached over **326 accounts**.

Further media coverage around Flush Smart Day included story publications by [Nonwovens Industry](#), [Tissue Online North America](#), [Mt. View Sanitation District](#), [FOX California](#), [Happi Magazine](#), and [Inland News Today](#).

We also published a series of syndicated articles dedicated to furthering our efforts to inform the public on what not to flush. These articles were picked up online in outlets including but not limited to the **LA Times**, **SFGate**, and **SFChronicle**. In total, these articles had a cumulative site audience of **651,773,060** and were placed in **4,300 publications**.

Lastly, RFA published 11 press releases throughout the year to inform the media of major milestones and moments happening with the organization and the #FlushSmart campaign, including the Flush Smart Day launch, new member acquisitions, consumer survey results, and more.

Altogether, our combined media efforts earned us **2,866 media mentions of the Responsible Flushing Alliance** and **2,877 media mentions for the “Do Not Flush”** symbol in 2023.

RFA believes these efforts will continue boosting consumer awareness of responsible flushing habits and why heeding the warning of the “Do Not Flush” symbol is so important. To measure this year's level of awareness and education, we are conducting our annual Fall consumer opinion and awareness survey. The survey concluded at the end of October. The results will be shared at the beginning of 2024.



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 provide educational solutions to problems caused by inappropriately flushed products. We work collaboratively with the wipes industry supply chain as well as 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 non-flushable wipes products through prominent, on-package displays of the “Do Not Flush” symbol, reminding people that if they see it, that wipe goes in the trash and never the toilet.

Supporting Members

- Crocodile Cloth
- 3M
- ANDRITZ Group - Nonwoven Division
- Biom
- California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)
- The Center for Baby & Adult Hygiene Products (BAHP)
- Clorox
- Cotton Inc.
- Dukal, LLC.
- DUDE Products
- Ecolabs
- Eleeo Brands
- Essity
- First Quality
- GOJO
- Goodwipes
- Guy & O’Neill
- H2O Global News
- The Hygiene Co.
- Kelheim Fibres GmbH
- Kenvue
- Kimberly-Clark
- National Stewardship Action Council (NSAC)
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
- Nehemiah Manufacturing
- Nice-Pak and PDI
- Papel Aralar S.A.
- Procter & Gamble
- Reckitt
- Rockline Industries
- Sellars Absorbent Materials
- Spartan Chemical
- Suominen Corporation
- Toilet Board Coalition
- Unilever
- WaterWipes

GOALS

- Clear and prominent labeling of non-flushable items and the adoption of smart flushing habits are key to helping solve the problem of wipe 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.

OUR GROWTH OVER THE YEARS

	2021	2022	2023
Impressions	1500	8.4M	30.7M
Clicks	NA	127.0K	167.1K
Video Views	NA	N/A	12.4M
Media Mentions	NA	1630	2918



Responsible
Flushing
Alliance

#FlushSmart