



Submitted by: Member Baldwin Day and  
Member Johnson  
Prepared by: Anchorage Water &  
Wastewater Utility  
Reviewed by: Assembly Legal Services  
For reading: June 23, 2026

**ANCHORAGE, ALASKA**  
**AO No. 2026-94**

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY AMENDING ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE SECTION 26.50.050 TO PROHIBIT THE DISCHARGE OF DISPOSABLE WIPES AND OTHER PERSONAL CARE OR CLEANING PRODUCTS INTO THE MUNICIPAL SEWERAGE SYSTEM.**

**WHEREAS**, disposable wipes, wet wipes, baby wipes, or disinfecting wipes, which are sometimes marketed as “flushable” or “sewer safe,” do not disintegrate in the sewer system like toilet paper and instead clog sewer pipes and jam wastewater treatment facility equipment; and

**WHEREAS**, every day between 6,000 and 7,000 pounds of disposable wipes reach the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility’s (AWWU) Asplund Wastewater Treatment Facility (Asplund); and

**WHEREAS**, disposable wipes flushed down toilets get tangled up with one another, rags, hair ties, paper towels, and dental floss to form twisted masses that damage pumps throughout the collection system and must be manually removed from the headworks at AWWU’s three wastewater treatment facilities to prevent clogs; and

**WHEREAS**, at least 25 times since 2021, disposable wipes have combined with other prohibited discharges like fats, oils, and grease in sewer mains to form congealed masses that caused sewage to back up unpredictably onto Anchorage streets, into green spaces, and into customers’ homes; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2025 Asplund operators spent an estimated 1,205 hours removing wipes from critical machinery at a cost to AWWU of about \$112,728, and disposing of those wipes at the landfill cost AWWU about \$95,385, representing only a fraction of AWWU’s total costs incurred dealing with wipes; and

**WHEREAS**, Title 26 is the Municipality’s primary regulatory tool for ensuring compliance with the Clean Water Act, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for the Asplund Wastewater Treatment Facility, the Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for the Eagle River and Girdwood wastewater treatment facilities, and federal and state water quality regulations; now, therefore,

**THE ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY ORDAINS:**

**Section 1.** Anchorage Municipal Code Section 26.50.050 is hereby amended to read as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**26.50.050 Prohibited Acts.**

A. It shall be unlawful for any user to:

\* \* \* \* \*

2. Discharge or cause to be discharged any of the following described pollutants, substances, or wastewater into the municipal sewerage system:

a. Any stormwater, surface water, surface runoff, groundwater, roof runoff, subsurface drainage, cooling water or other unpolluted water.

b. Any water or wastewater which contains petroleum oil, nonbiodegradable cutting oil, or products of mineral oil origin in amounts that will cause interference or pass through or which in the opinion of the utility are in amounts greater than that which would be normally construed as incidental in normal discharges.

c. Any solid or viscous substance, or liquid that can become viscous when cooled, in amounts capable of causing obstruction to the flow in sewers or other interference with the proper operation of the sewerage system such as, but not limited to fat, grease, uncomminuted garbage, animal guts or tissues, hair, hide, fleshings or entrails.

\* \* \* \* \*

n. Any quantity of disposable wipes, regardless of product labelling.

\* \* \* \* \*

(AO No. 81-207; AO No. 86-118, 9-4-86; AO No. 2000-129(S), § 6, 11-21-00; AO No. 2012-77, § 5, 8-7-12)

Note(s)—Formerly § 26.50.022.

**Section 2.** This ordinance shall be effective immediately upon passage and approval by the Assembly.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Assembly this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

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ATTEST:

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Municipal Clerk



**MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE  
ASSEMBLY MEMORANDUM**

No. AM 417-2026

Meeting Date: June 23, 2026

1 **From: Assembly Members Baldwin Day and Johnson**

2  
3 **Subject: AO 2026-94 – AN ORDINANCE OF THE ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL**  
4 **ASSEMBLY AMENDING ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE**  
5 **SECTION 26.50.050 TO PROHIBIT THE DISCHARGE OF**  
6 **DISPOSABLE WIPES AND OTHER PERSONAL CARE OR**  
7 **CLEANING PRODUCTS INTO THE MUNICIPAL SEWERAGE**  
8 **SYSTEM.**  
9

10 The purpose of this ordinance is to make clear that flushing disposable wipes into  
11 the municipal sewer system is unlawful. The discharge of disposable wipes, which  
12 are marketed as flushable wipes, baby wipes, wet wipes, and disinfecting wipes –  
13 collectively called “disposable wipes” in this ordinance – has significant negative  
14 impacts on the municipal sewer system.  
15

16 Once in sewer mains, wipes provide a textured surface onto which fats, oil, grease,  
17 and grit attach, forming “fatbergs” that clog sewer mains and can cause sewage to  
18 backup into homes, onto streets, or into greenspaces. When AWWU’s operators  
19 respond to these events, known as sanitary sewer overflows, they frequently  
20 observe disposable wipes in the blockages. Disposable wipes can also jam pumps  
21 throughout the collection system, resulting in more maintenance calls and shorter  
22 life spans for the pumps.  
23

24 Once wipes reach one of the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility’s (AWWU)  
25 three wastewater treatment plants, they tangle with each other, paper towels, dental  
26 floss, rags, and other products into large masses that block filters, damage  
27 equipment, and require operators to spend hours manually removing them. The  
28 superintendent of AWWU’s largest wastewater treatment plant, the Asplund  
29 Wastewater Treatment Facility, estimates that 6,000 to 7,000 pounds of wipes reach  
30 the plant daily.  
31

32 In 2025, operators at the Asplund Wastewater Treatment Facility spent an estimated  
33 1,205 hours removing wipes from machinery at the facility. Those 1,205 hours of  
34 employee time cost AWWU an estimated \$112,728. AWWU also spent an estimated  
35 \$95,385 in 2025 paying to dispose of the three tons of wipes removed from Asplund  
36 daily at SWS’s Anchorage Regional Landfill. On top of those costs, AWWU spent  
37 thousands more on labor, materials, fuel, and parts to repair pumps throughout the  
38 collection system jammed by wipes, jetting fatbergs and wipe balls from sewer  
39 mains, and maintaining facilities aging prematurely because of wipes.  
40

41 Title 26 is the Municipality’s primary tool for regulating the use of its sewer system.  
42 Title 26 is a critical tool for ensuring compliance with the Clean Water Act, the  
43 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for Asplund, and the Alaska  
44 Pollutant Discharge Elimination System for the Girdwood and Eagle River

1 wastewater treatment facilities. Title 26 limits what goes into the sewer system in  
2 the first place to ensure that what comes out the pipes after treatment meets or  
3 exceeds the standards in AWWU's permits.

4  
5 Although the existing prohibition on discharging solids capable of obstructing flow  
6 or interfering with the operation of the sewer system at AMC 26.50.050A.2.c. likely  
7 applies to disposable wipes, expressly prohibiting the discharge of disposable wipes  
8 will provide clearer notice to customers and give AWWU clearer enforcement  
9 authority.

10  
11 Title 14 already sets fines for violations of AMC 26.50.050A.2. Thus, documented  
12 violations of the prohibition on discharging disposable wipes would also be subject  
13 to fines of \$75.00 to \$1,000.00.

14  
15 Restricting what enters the sewer system reduces AWWU's maintenance costs and  
16 the frequency of sanitary sewer overflows, both of which help stabilize rates for  
17 AWWU sewer customers.

18  
19 A news article from the *Anchorage Daily News* about the problems disposable wipes  
20 cause for AWWU is attached to this memorandum.<sup>1</sup>

21  
22 This ordinance has no private sector economic effects because residents and  
23 businesses can dispose of wipes through their existing trash services, and local  
24 government effects are less than \$30,000. Therefore, pursuant to AMC  
25 2.30.050B.1., a summary of economic effects is not required.

26  
27 **We request your support for the ordinance.**

28  
29 Prepared by: Allison B. Lang, Esq., Assistant General Manager,  
30 AWWU

31  
32 Reviewed by: David A. Persinger, P.E., General Manager, AWWU

33  
34 Respectfully submitted: Erin Baldwin Day, Assembly Member  
35 District 4 – Midtown Anchorage

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37 Zac Johnson, Assembly Member  
38 District 6 – South Anchorage, Girdwood, & Turnagain  
39 Arm

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<sup>1</sup> Zachariah Hughes, *Wet wipes flushed down Anchorage toilets wreak havoc on city water utility, contributing to higher costs*, ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS (Dec. 15, 2024), <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/anchorage/2024/12/15/wet-wipes-flushed-down-anchorage-toilets-wreak-havoc-on-city-water-utility-contributing-to-higher-costs/>.

1 ***Wet wipes flushed down Anchorage toilets wreak havoc on city***  
2 ***water utility, contributing to higher costs***

3  
4 By Zachariah Hughes

5 ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS

6 Published: December 15, 2024

7 Available at: <https://www.adn.com/alaska->

8 [news/anchorage/2024/12/15/wet-wipes-flushed-down-anchorage-](https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/anchorage/2024/12/15/wet-wipes-flushed-down-anchorage-toilets-wreak-havoc-on-city-water-utility-contributing-to-higher-costs/)  
9 [toilets-wreak-havoc-on-city-water-utility-contributing-to-](https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/anchorage/2024/12/15/wet-wipes-flushed-down-anchorage-toilets-wreak-havoc-on-city-water-utility-contributing-to-higher-costs/)  
10 [higher-costs/](https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/anchorage/2024/12/15/wet-wipes-flushed-down-anchorage-toilets-wreak-havoc-on-city-water-utility-contributing-to-higher-costs/).

11  
12 For 10 years, part of Brian Schmitz's job at Anchorage's  
13 Asplund Wastewater Treatment Facility was "de-ragging"  
14 equipment.

15  
16 That is, manually removing masses of fouled wipes flushed  
17 down people's toilets that eventually congeal throughout the  
18 sewage system and gunk up equipment.

19  
20 "Rags" are what people in the water treatment business call  
21 the broad class of consumer products known as "wipes" – baby  
22 wipes, disinfectant wipes and "personal cleansing wipes"  
23 that are used like toilet paper, with names like Dude Wipes,  
24 Stall Mates and GoodWipes Flushable Butt Wipes.  
25 Manufacturers declare boldly on the packaging that the items  
26 are "flushable."

27  
28 "That's what the rags do," said Schmitz, now the plant's  
29 superintendent, pointing to what looked like a mound of  
30 frozen seaweed piled on a dumpster. It was a conglomeration  
31 of browned wipes saturated with raw sewage overflowing from  
32 a hopper. It smelled like a neglected zoo enclosure on a hot  
33 summer day.

34  
35 "We call 'em 'rope rags,'" Schmitz said, referring to the  
36 phenomenon of many individual wipes getting spun, mashed and  
37 twisted around one another until the mass grows so large it  
38 bedevils screening equipment. Plant operators, like Schmitz  
39 in his younger years, must periodically extract the rope  
40 rags with chains, pitchforks and a custom-made treble hook  
41 that looks like a tool for fishing giant squid.

42  
43 "(We get) this amount probably every three or four days," he  
44 added, staring at the specimen heaped before him in the  
45 treatment plant's lower level.

46  
47 Like public water and sewer utilities all over the country,  
48 Anchorage has a rag problem. The products are typically made  
49 from non-woven fabrics derived from petrochemicals, though

1 some brands tout their organic composition. Technically  
2 speaking, they are indeed "flushable," in that they will  
3 disappear down a toilet and move through the sewer system.  
4 But unlike toilet paper, wipes do not break down in water.  
5 Instead, they clutter and clog utility equipment designed to  
6 pump huge volumes of organic waste and water toward the  
7 Asplund plant, where it is treated and discharged into Cook  
8 Inlet.

9  
10 "For the wastewater industry, the cost of wipes in it is  
11 horrendous," said Sandy Baker, the coordinator of public  
12 outreach for the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility.

13  
14 The AWWU facility is the largest treatment plant in Alaska,  
15 taking in 30 million gallons of wastewater each day. The  
16 greatest volume of wipes ends up there, between 6,000 and  
17 7,000 pounds daily belched through an 8-foot diameter pipe  
18 that feeds "influent wastewater" into filtration chutes. The  
19 majority of those wipes are removed from the water system  
20 during the screening process, along with all kinds of  
21 detritus, from gritty bits of sand and rock to clothing and  
22 household trash.

23  
24 But the rope rags are too massive for that, and have to be  
25 manually dislodged. This happens not just at the main  
26 Asplund facility but from smaller pumps scattered all  
27 throughout the sewer system.

28  
29 "We probably have more wear and tear (at) our pumps," Baker  
30 said. "It's thousands upon thousands of dollars for one of  
31 those pumps."

32  
33 Wipes are not a new issue for AWWU. But the problems they  
34 cause worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic because more of  
35 them were getting flushed, and the volume has not returned  
36 to its pre-pandemic level.

37  
38 "Everybody was using them to wipe down their surfaces,"  
39 Schmitz said.

40  
41 "People got used to it," Baker cut in.

42  
43 "They got in the habit of buying the wipes and being 'ultra  
44 hygienic,'" Schmitz added.

45  
46 This was a national trend. It got so bad during the early  
47 lockdown phase that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
48 issued a notice.

49  
50 "Flushing anything other than toilet paper, including

1 disinfecting wipes, can damage internal plumbing, local  
2 sewer system. Fixing these backups is costly and takes time  
3 and resources away from ensuring that wastewater management  
4 systems are otherwise working properly," the agency wrote in  
5 March 2020.

6  
7 Wipes are not the only bathroom detritus that jam up the  
8 flow of sewage. Schmitz said other particularly troublesome  
9 grooming supplies that show up are dental floss, hair ties  
10 and rubber bands, all of which get tangled in gears and knot  
11 around machinery.

12  
13 Organic matter that arrives at Asplund is incinerated. But  
14 the tons of matted wipes can't be, and instead are diverted  
15 and then put into dump trucks to be hauled off each day to  
16 the landfill, along with about five tons of ash from the  
17 incinerated poop.

18  
19 Calculating the exact cost incurred on the utility from  
20 wipes is tricky, in part because they've been gunking up the  
21 sewage system for long enough that the procedures for  
22 dealing with them are routine.

23  
24 "So you don't even know how much you'd be saving if they  
25 weren't there," Baker said.

26  
27 In 2020, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies,  
28 which lobbies for water utilities around the country,  
29 published a report that sought to calculate the cost of  
30 wipes on public water systems across America.

31  
32 The researchers used a conservative methodology to arrive at  
33 a price tag of \$441 million per year in additional costs.  
34 That figure primarily came through operating costs from  
35 sending employees to clean and repair equipment choked with  
36 wipes. It did not include capital expenditures for replacing  
37 equipment that breaks or degrades more rapidly because of  
38 wipes.

39  
40 Schmitz lost an auger to rags this year, but said it's  
41 difficult to directly attribute equipment failures to them.  
42 Rather, he thinks the costs show up in a shorter lifespan  
43 for equipment that wears out more quickly.

44  
45 Earlier this month, the Anchorage Assembly voted to allow a  
46 proposed increase in rates for AWWU customers. If state  
47 regulators approve the plan, it will mean roughly 5% more on  
48 ratepayers' water bills, equating to \$72 more per year. In  
49 explaining the increase, AWWU has cited rising costs from  
50 permitting, commercial chemicals, and labor, a portion of

1 which is applied to de-ragging sewage equipment.

2  
3 Seven states have dealt with the problem by passing  
4 legislation mandating that wipe products be clearly labeled  
5 as non-flushable. And this past June, Congress passed the  
6 Wastewater Infrastructure Pollution Prevention and  
7 Environments Safety Act, or WIPPES Act. The measure,  
8 cosponsored by outgoing Democratic Alaska Rep. Mary Peltola,  
9 would "require certain products be labeled with 'Do Not  
10 Flush' labeling," and establish penalties for violations.  
11 The bill was sent over to the Senate, where it has remained  
12 in the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

13  
14 Should the act pass, it might eventually change customers'  
15 understanding and purchasing habits of "flushable wipes,"  
16 Baker said, but it won't be a panacea for the water  
17 industry's wipe woes. It also may be hard to get people to  
18 abandon habits they've had for years without ever viewing  
19 the toll it takes on public infrastructure.

20  
21 Baker and Schmitz both said that educating the public is the  
22 factor that will ultimately make the biggest difference. In  
23 its public releases and social media posts, AWWU regularly  
24 pleads with people not to dispose of them in pipes and  
25 septic tanks, including in a 12-minute video Baker narrated  
26 about the utility's treatment plants.

27  
28 "They cause havoc in the system," Baker says at one point.  
29 "Please, don't flush any wipes, even if they say  
30 'flushable.' Just throw them away."