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NAVIGATING THE NOISE: HOW TO EFFECTIVELY CONVEY YOUR SUSTAINABILITY MESSAGE

by Katie Bramschreiber

Katie Bramschreiber, the director of account services at Element, said integrating sustainability messaging into a marketing strategy starts with first determining the why.

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FOUNDRIES AND THE EVOLUTION OF SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING

by Bryant Esch

Though change can be daunting, Bryant Esch, corporate sustainability manager with Waupaca Foundry, Inc., discusses how organizations can help position themselves as leaders in their industry by embracing sustainability.

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LAUDATO SI': A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

by Dusty Krikau

Dusty Krikau, the director of mission advancement for the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes in Fond du Lac, discusses Laudato Si' – a practical framework businesses can follow when determining their own goals and strategies for sustainable growth.

Whether through a faith-based lens or an economic lens – Krikau shows how the framework can help businesses do their part in addressing the socio-ecological crisis.

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PROTECTING OUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE: WATER

by Tricia Garrison & Sharon Thieszen

Water is neither created nor destroyed, and we aren't getting any more.

NEW Water's public affairs and education manager, Tricia Garrison, and field services manager, Sharon Thieszen, highlight the importance of protecting Wisconsin's precious waterways – for the best interest for our economy, our health and our way of life.

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“Never forget you live at the mouth of the world’s largest freshwater estuary, and never forget the great responsibility you have for that,” Dr. Harold “Jack” Day, former NEW Water Commission president and UWGB professor emeritus, said.

At NEW Water, the brand of the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District, we strive to protect our most valuable resource, water.

We invite you to join this critical effort.

There is so much to be done – why not start with your toilet?

We’re water rich in Wisconsin.

More than 15,000 lakes, an abundance of rivers, streams, creeks, wetlands and, of course, two majestic Great Lakes on our borders.

Does being “flush” with water make us take it for granted, just a smidge?

From our perspective at the end

of the pipe: Probably.

Let’s be real.

After you flush, have you ever really thought about what happens next, where all of “it” goes? Probably not.

And that’s okay.

The dedicated team at NEW Water is working around the clock on handling this, so you don’t have to.

However, on behalf of all wastewater workers, we offer you a summary of the journey of “it,” along with a plea: Please. Stop. Treating. Toilets. Like. Trashcans.

Last year, NEW Water cleaned about 15 billion gallons of water for Northeast Wisconsin, so you all could flush the toilet, do your laundry, do the dishes and run your businesses whenever you wanted.

Daily, however, frontline wastewater workers are faced with piles of muck, which our industry has nicknamed “unflushables” – piles of stuff that never should have been flushed in the first place.

Unflushables include wipes (even those labeled “flushable”); dental floss; tissues; hygiene and sanitary products; diapers; cotton balls; fats, oils and grease; hypodermic needles; candy wrappers; toothbrushes... and so much more.

Along with our proud wastewater industry, NEW Water recommends that you only flush the “3Ps” – this is No. 1 (pee), No. 2 (poop), and No. 3 (toilet paper) – and, as school children remind us during educational events, a fourth “p,” puke, is also okay.

Why does our plea matter?

Like an otherworldly creature from a horror film, unflushables can congeal into giant balls of ick. Just Google “fatberg,” and you’ll see what we mean (be forewarned, you won’t be able to unsee it).

The famous fatberg of London weighed in at 130 tons, and Detroit suffered its own 19-ton version as well.

In our Greater Green Bay

area, we screen out and send to the landfill more than 22 tons of unflushable materials every month.

Though our staff estimates that the actual amount of unflushables coming through our facilities is likely more than double because the equipment cannot catch it all.

Unflushables clog up our pumps, pipes and other critical equipment, necessitating staff to literally pull the mess, by hand, from the equipment, so it can keep working to serve our community.

This provides safety risks for them as well.

We’ve seen used needles come through our systems as well.

Surprised?

So were we.

An occupational nurse told us she thought they were likely hypodermic needles for medical purposes.

We cannot really pinpoint the exact source of these needles, given the magnitude of our interceptor system, which spans 285-square



miles (in non-engineering speak, “interceptor” means “really big” pipes that connect other smaller pipes, and transport all that dirty water to our facilities to be cleaned).

However, we have our suspicions on the needles.

We are grateful for a continued partnership with Brown County Health to get the word out on this topic.

In our experience, the inner workings of a sanitary sewer system are mysterious to most people. But after a tour, we frequently hear “wow, I had no idea.”

They explain that they had no idea what it takes to clean wastewater – and they also had no idea of the damage unflushables can cause.

We’ve also learned that once people are aware, they gladly heed the call to become #FlushFighters, pledging to only flush the 3Ps.

As for the needles, our own

internal CSI: Crap Happens Team surmises that they may have been dumped into a Porta Potty (or as it is formally known, a portable restroom), by unsuspecting people who assumed that it was a trash can.

Yes, any “stuff” that’s dropped into Porta Potties also goes somewhere.

Just because it doesn’t flush, doesn’t mean it doesn’t get disposed of.

And chances are in Northeast Wisconsin, it’s coming to NEW Water.

In 2023, NEW Water accepted 31.2 million gallons of hauled waste from sources including Porta Potties and septic tanks from people’s homes who live in rural areas.

Shout-out to septage haulers for the important public health service that they provide, and props for the sayings on their trucks, such as a perennial favorite: “Yesterday’s Meals on Wheels.” Haulers tell us

that their truck equipment also gets clogged with the “non-3Ps” items that people dump, such as soda and beer cans, baby diapers, clothing, fast food boxes and wrappers.

Their trucks can only screen so much, like a wastewater facility.

Many other items slip through the screens, and will be passed through to area waterways, harming our environment and public health.

Microplastics: 22 million pounds, and counting

According to the Alliance for the Great Lakes, a whopping 22 million pounds of microplastics end up in our Great Lakes each year.

Some of that hails from unflushables being flushed down the toilet.

Some tissues, feminine hygiene products, toothpastes, scrubs, cleansers and other products may contain microplastics.

Microplastics range in size from the size of a grain of rice, to

microscopic.

Microplastics do not break down – they pass through to the waterways, essentially unchanged.

“At NEW Water, we are dedicated to ensuring that every drop of water receives the care it deserves,” Tom Sigmund, executive director of NEW Water, said. “Our wastewater treatment plants are efficient at what they are designed to do, but they can only do so much. Just like we wouldn’t toss unwanted items into a pristine lake, we urge everyone to treat their toilets with the same respect. Flushing anything besides human waste and toilet paper can strain our systems and harm our waterways. Let’s work together to keep our water clean and our environment healthy for generations to come.”

Meds and pharmaceuticals: An unsavory ‘soup’

While medications and pharmaceuticals may not damage

BY TRICIA GARRISON & SHARON THIESZEN

PROTECTING OUR
MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE



expensive pipes, pumps and equipment, if flushed, they can have devastating impacts to our area waterways and public health.

Unused meds and pharmaceuticals should never be flushed down the toilet.

“Pharmaceuticals will travel through the pipes and their presence in the aquatic environment tells us not all are being removed during the wastewater treatment process,” Dr. Sarah Bartlett, freshwater scientist at NEW Water, said. “There are so many pharmaceuticals out there, the science is still trying to learn how these drugs will impact the entire food web. It’s impossible to do these studies quickly to keep up. We do not want this pharmaceutical ‘soup’ to end up in our freshwater ways.”

Luckily, there are many drop-off locations in the area, where unused medications can be taken for safe

and proper disposal.

Pro tip: Brown County Resource Recovery is an excellent resource for our community – check out its website (browncountyrecycling.org) for information on medication drop-off locations, as well as a wealth of other information on how and where to properly dispose of other items to protect our environment.

Looking back, looking forward

Water is neither created nor destroyed, and what we have on the planet now is the same water that was here when dinosaurs roamed.

And for future needs, we aren’t getting any more water.

With the Great Lakes representing 20% of the world’s remaining surface freshwater, we all can do a little better in Wisconsin to protect this glorious treasure in our

backyard.

Fun side note: In the Greater Green Bay area, our water essentially stays in the basin – this is a great sustainability measure from a water quantity standpoint.

Northeast Wisconsin’s drinking water utilities pull water from Lake Michigan to serve their customers.

We turn on the tap and out comes fresh water, tasty and clean.

We use it for washing hands, taking showers, flushing the toilet, etc.

That dirty water winds through the complex underground web of pipes and interceptors, leading to NEW Water to be cleaned and sent back into the Fox River, which flows into the Bay of Green Bay, which flows into Lake Michigan, and so on.

Our community’s water stays here. This is not the case in many communities elsewhere.

Discharge pipes from wastewater facilities sometimes lead out of the

basin, and sometimes even flow onward into other states.

Protecting our precious waterways is in the best interests for our economy, our health and our way of life.

Historically, it has been said that the Fox River was a mighty “work horse,” and that we had “turned our backs” on the water.

Nowadays, many community efforts are bringing people together to celebrate our precious waters, from the City Deck in Green Bay to the boardwalk in De Pere and many other great examples on the horizon as well.

Let’s please, keep the momentum going.

Tours of NEW Water’s Green Bay Facility are free of charge, and open to the public, ages 12 and up.

Please visit our website (newwater.us) to sign up.

And while you’re there, take the pledge to become a #FlushFighter.