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BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU POUR DOWN THE DRAIN

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Have you thought about what you pour down the drain? From products in everyday use, like washing up liquid, shampoo and shower gel to bleach and various other cleaning chemicals, it's often a case of 'out of sight, out of mind.'

However, some of these liquids can be very damaging, not just to wastewater treatment processes, but to drainage systems too. Substances like cooking oils harden upon cooling and can cause serious blockages; other chemical substances like paint thinners can actually damage pipework.

Great care is therefore needed for what goes down the sink or toilet, whether you are a householder, plumber, installer or other building contractor.

National legislation specifies what should not be put down a drainage system – see for example [Pollution prevention for businesses - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses). Domestic wastewater is described in this legislation but in practice there is such a broad range of cleaning products, hygiene products, food waste and waste from DIY activities that identifying what can or cannot be poured down the sink can be problematic.

Domestic sinks and toilets are not always suitable for the disposal of unwanted substances which can be harmful to pipes. In terms of commonly used chemicals

used around the home environment, the manufacturers' instructions for use and disposal should always be checked, and the BPF Pipes Group provides a helpful summary, including details of national legislation and guidance, in its document ['Discharge to drains from domestic properties.'](#)

Waste pipework systems and their design

As we spend more time indoors during winter and turn our attention to New Year DIY projects and personal wellbeing, there is the potential for harmful chemicals to be put down the sink. This may be done unknowingly, with people not realising that it could cause damage to pipework. Domestic waste pipe systems, typically comprising pipes and fittings, traps and internal or external soil stacks, which are designed and manufactured in accordance with the relevant standards, are suitable for use with discharges permitted by national legislation.

Common waste substances and how they affect the pipework

Cooking liquid, such as boiling water, should always be cooled before pouring down a sink although plastic pipework will tolerate non-hazardous hot liquids for a short period. Food waste or oils are not directly harmful but can contribute to blockages, requiring the use of chemical or mechanical cleaners. Never put fats, oil, grease or solid items down drains.

Personal hygiene products are generally diluted during use and not harmful to pipework (apart from wet wipes) but hair treatment products like bleaches and dyes should always be used according to manufacturers' instructions. Undiluted products, like aromatherapy oils and nail varnish solvents, may be harmful and shouldn't be poured down a sink.

Laundry and dishwashing products are usually diluted for use and are not harmful to plastic pipes; but fabric treatment products and dyes should always be used according to manufacturers' instructions. Household cleaning products should always be used in accordance with manufacturers' guidance for dilution and

disposal after use. Undiluted remnants should not be poured down a sink. Particularly caustic drain cleaning products should never be used as these could damage plastic pipework.

Where to learn more?

As well as its summary document, the BPF Pipes Group produces extensive guidance on installing below and above ground plastic pipes, intended to encourage best practice and circularity across the entire industry. All guidance documents are available at <https://www.bfppipesgroup.com/technical-information/technical-guidance/>