When Wet Wipes Turn Nasty!
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Background
Wet wipes are one of the great convenience products of the 21st century, with more than 70% of people using some form of single-use wipes. However, instead of ending up in the bin when they’re finished with, many end up being thrown down the toilet ultimately ending up in the sea. What’s worse, even the ones labelled as ‘flushable’ may contain plastic.

The Marine Conservation Society’s Great British Beach Clean 2016 report showed that wet wipes had increased by 700% in a decade. In 2017 we saw a further rise of 94% in the average number of wet wipes on our beaches compared to 2016.

The problem
Currently no wet wipes meet water industry standards for what can be safely flushed without causing problems - including wipes labelled as flushable. It costs SW Water in the UK £4.5million each year to clear around 8,500 blockages – about 65% of which are caused by wipes and other sanitary products being flushed down the toilet.

Outcomes
Over 10,000 signed our petition to demand clearer wet wipe labelling and eight UK water companies backed the campaign. We engaged 100,000 people on social media, 13.9 million media reach and a 23% public awareness of the campaign.

EDANA the industry body responsible for wipes have introduced voluntary guidelines on how non-flushable wipes should be labelled.

We have worked with the main UK retailers, with 12 reviewing the flushability, labelling and plastic content of their own brand wipes. This is critical, as over 30% of people surveyed do not read disposal information, and 20% have flushed wet wipes, even if they weren’t labelled as flushable. (YouGov poll for the MCS 2017)

The campaign
MCS launched the ‘Wet Wipes Turn Nasty’ campaign in June 2016. We created an inflatable wet wipe monster - Wallace, for events, trialled new types of campaign communication, created a petition for people to sign, took retailers down the sewers to get face to face with the issue and created a series of images to highlight the problem.

Next steps
We’ll be keeping up the pressure! When the new water industry standard (WIS) is published we will be calling on EDANA to update their guidelines to manufactures, and for retailers to commit to:

a) ensuring that any products labelled as flushable meet the new water company flushability standard and do not contain plastic, and
b) that all other products which consumers might consider flushing, including wipes falling short of the standard, are clearly labelled ‘Do Not Flush’.

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