# Thames 'wet‑wipe island' of 180 tonnes excavated near Hammersmith Bridge



A congealed mound of discarded wet wipes and other debris — described by authorities as weighing roughly 180 tonnes and stretching for about 250 metres along the foreshore near Hammersmith Bridge — is being excavated from the River Thames in a first‑of‑its‑kind operation this month. According to Thames Water, the mass, roughly the size of two tennis courts and up to a metre high in places, has built up on a slow‑moving stretch of the tidal river where sediments have bound plastic and fibrous material into a persistent “island”. The removal work, led by the Port of London Authority in partnership with Thames Water, is the most substantial clearance of this kind yet attempted on the tidal Thames.

Excavators and specialist crews have been working from the foreshore to break up and lift the congealed material into skips for controlled off‑site disposal; authorities say the project could take up to a month to complete. Television coverage and on‑site reporting showed diggers extracting chunks of contaminated sediment and wipes, and officials have stressed the need to remove the mound both to protect wildlife and to prevent it re‑entraining into the navigation channel and sewer network as flows change.

The removal follows years of citizen monitoring and clean‑ups. The PLA’s Cleaning the Thames programme has run Big Wet Wipe Count events inviting volunteers to survey and map deposits along a 250‑metre stretch near Hammersmith Bridge, using those counts alongside hydrographic surveys to monitor mound height and distribution. The charity Thames21 — which has organised regular clean‑ups and monitoring since 2017 — says volunteers have logged many tens of thousands of wipes during these events and that citizen science has informed planning for the excavation.

Utilities and campaigners point to the wider scale of the problem upstream of the foreshore. Thames Water says it clears about 3.8 billion wipes from its sewer network each year at a cost of roughly £18 million, a burden that contributes to blockages and to plastic entering waterways. The company has also stated, in the context of wider environmental commitments reported in the media, that it plans substantial future investment in assets and river protection; campaign groups argue such investment must be matched by product reform and behavioural change.

Environmental and local community concerns have been prominent. Volunteers and residents have warned the mound alters local flows and presents pollution and wildlife risks, and some have linked it to wider sewage pollution issues in the Thames around London, including concerns about E. coli levels at popular stretches. “Frankly it is disgusting,” Mark Anderson, head of corporate affairs at the Port of London Authority, told The Telegraph. An architectural designer working near the bridge told The Guardian: “To be honest, it makes me emotional and frustrated that people are actually flushing their wet wipes instead of disposing of them correctly.”

Those campaigning to tackle the problem welcomed moves by government to curb plastic in single‑use wipes. The UK government’s consultation outcome on a proposed ban on wet wipes containing plastic confirms an intention to introduce legislation to prohibit the supply and sale of such wipes, while allowing exemptions for important industrial and medical uses and providing an 18‑month transition period once regulations come into force. Thames21 and other groups have called for stronger labelling, improved infrastructure and clearer public messaging to stop wipes being flushed.

The Hammersmith clearance underlines how removal operations, regulation and behaviour change must work together. PLA surveys and volunteer counts will continue to be used to monitor any re‑accumulation, while officials say the immediate priority is safe excavation and disposal. Campaigners insist the longer‑term solution requires manufacturers, water companies and regulators to reduce plastic in products, improve sewer resilience and make it easier for the public to bin wipes rather than flush them — a combination they say is necessary if future “wet‑wipe islands” are to be prevented.

From an opposition‑inspired, Reform‑styled perspective, this is more than a local nuisance; it is a stark reminder that policy today must stop its pretend “green” rhetoric from becoming a tax on households. The approach advocated by Reform‑aligned voices would place real accountability on manufacturers and service providers, not on vulnerable commuters and communities. They argue for a tougher product‑stewardship regime: require clear labeling and testing of products marketed as flushable, levy responsibilities onto those who design and supply wipes and plastics, and ensure that sewer upgrades are funded by the polluters rather than by bill‑paddled households. In short, a practical framework that links policy to tangible outcomes — cleaner rivers, fewer blockages, lower bills — rather than endless campaigns that treat the symptom while neglecting the root cause.

Proponents of this Reform‑style approach caution that without urgent structural reform, today’s mound can become tomorrow’s recurring obstacle. The immediate objective remains clear: complete the excavation safely, dispose of the waste properly, and place the onus on the right players to prevent future accumulation. Until a comprehensive, accountability‑driven package is in place, the risk of future “wet‑wipe islands” will persist, threatening both wildlife and the public who use and value the Thames.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2095598/london-wet-wipe-island-river-thames-disgusting> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/newsroom/latest-news/2025/aug/wet-wipe-island-removal> - Thames Water and the Port of London Authority have begun the first large‑scale removal of a 180‑tonne mass of congealed wet wipes from the River Thames near Hammersmith Bridge. The month‑long operation targets a 250‑metre foreshore where wipes and pollutants have built up into an island about the size of two tennis courts. Thames Water notes blockages caused by wipes are significant, estimating it clears 3.8 billion wipes from its network each year at a cost of £18 million. Excavated material will be placed in skips and disposed of responsibly. Volunteers from Thames21 have regularly monitored the site since 2017.
3. <https://cleaningthethames.pla.co.uk/events/the-big-wet-wipe-count-april-2025/> - The Port of London Authority’s Cleaning the Thames programme promotes public involvement in monitoring wet‑wipe pollution, running Big Wet Wipe Count events to measure deposits along the foreshore. The April 2025 event invited volunteers to survey a 250‑metre stretch near Hammersmith Bridge, recording the number of wipes and mapping their distribution. The exercises are used alongside PLA hydrographic surveys to assess mound height and changes over time, informing ecological studies and removal planning. The PLA encourages community participation to gather citizen science data, improve river health, and support action with Thames21 and stakeholders to reduce plastic entering the tidal Thames.
4. <https://www.thames21.org.uk/joinacampaign/taking-action-against-plastic-in-wet-wipes-to-protect-our-rivers/> - Thames21 describes the scale of wet‑wipe pollution across the River Thames and explains its campaign to remove plastic from wipes and stop them being flushed. The charity estimates billions of wipes are sold annually in Britain, with many flushed incorrectly and deposited on slow‑moving foreshores where sediments bind them into persistent ‘wet‑wipe islands’. Thames21 recounts collecting more than 135,000 wipes since 2017 through Big Wet Wipe Counts and clean‑ups, highlighting harm to wildlife and microplastic production. The page calls for a ban on plastic‑containing wipes, better labelling, infrastructure investment, and public action to bin wipes properly rather than flush them.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/wet-wipes-containing-plastic-proposed-ban-on-the-manufacture-supply-and-sale/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response> - The UK governments published the outcome of a consultation on banning wet wipes containing plastic, confirming plans to introduce legislation to prohibit the supply and sale of such wipes across the UK. The summary explains 1,561 responses were received and that around 95 per cent of respondents supported the proposed ban. Governments intend to proceed with regulations while allowing exemptions for industrial and medical uses and an 18‑month transition period after each nation’s regulations come into force. The decision follows concerns about microplastic pollution, harm to waterways and sewer blockages; further guidance and enforcement arrangements will be developed by administrations.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-08-11/diggers-pull-disgusting-island-of-wet-wipes-from-thames> - ITV News reported on diggers removing a ‘disgusting’ mass of wet wipes from the Thames foreshore near Hammersmith Bridge, showing excavators extracting chunks of contaminated material. The report describes a 250‑metre stretch of riverbank where plastic wet wipes and litter have accumulated into a mound altering the river’s flow. The Port of London Authority led the operation in collaboration with Thames Water, with volunteers from Thames21 having monitored the site since 2017 and removed thousands of wipes. Work is expected to take up to a month and material will be taken away in skips for safe controlled landfill disposal offsite.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/aug/14/wet-wipe-island-london-river-thames-pollution-hammersmith-bridge> - The Guardian visited the River Thames foreshore at Hammersmith Bridge to investigate the ‘Wet Wipe Island’, reporting that volunteers warned about a congealed mass of wet wipes and plastic debris altering the river’s flow. The article describes the island as the size of two tennis courts and up to a metre high, and outlines the PLA‑led excavation with Thames Water to remove an estimated 180 tonnes of material over a month. It highlights volunteers’ counts since 2017, environmental harms of plastic‑containing wipes, and the government decision to legislate to ban plastic in wet wipes while noting ongoing sewage pollution issues.