

Pedro Rollán visited the Arroyo Culebro Cuenca Media Alta waste water treatment plant to inspect how waste water is treated in the Community

In 2017, Canal de Isabel II removed more than 28,000 tonnes of solid waste from its treatment plants

- Although this figure is 12 % lower than in 2016, it should be noted that wet wipes and other items of personal hygiene must always be disposed of in the rubbish
- The public company estimates the additional costs generated by this type of waste to be around 2.2 million Euros

22AUG18 – Canal de Isabel II removed 28,433 tonnes of solid waste from its waste water treatment plants during last year. These are items which should never be in the sewage network: in addition to wet wipes, everyday the 157 waste water treatment plants (EDAR) run by Canal in the Community of Madrid receive products which are flushed down the toilet. These include cotton buds, items of feminine hygiene or even hair. This is not only a serious problem in operational and economic terms but may also cause severe environmental damage.

The figure, as vice-chairman, Minister for the Presidency and spokesperson for the Government of the Community of Madrid, and chairman of Canal de Isabel II, Pedro Rollán, explained during his visit this morning to the Arroyo Culebro Cuenca Media-Alta EDAR, indicates a change in the tendency. A continuous increase in this type of waste in the EDAR had been observed, and for the first time in recent years it has fallen: specifically, in 2016 32,244 tonnes of waste were collected, 12 % more than in the following year. At this installation, the vice-chairman was able to inspect not only how the waste is eliminated in the pre-treatment phase, but also how the waste water is treated in order to be returned to the rivers with the best possible quality.

WET WIPES: A PROBLEM UNDER CONTROL, BUT STILL PRESENT

In the summer of 2016, after finding that since 2010 there had been a 20 % increase in the collection of this type of waste, Canal de Isabel II launched a campaign to make the public more aware and prevent them from throwing these items into the toilets in their homes, but to dispose of them in the rubbish.

The journey travelled by a wet wipe, together with other waste, when it is flushed down the toilet takes it along the interior pipes of the dwelling, where it may cause blockages, especially if oil and other items which contribute to forming larger blockages are also

thrown down the drains. Next, it travels along the sewage network and through the waste water pumping installations until finally reaching the waste water treatment plants.

Although labelled as biodegradable, the time taken from when the wipe is flushed down the toilet to when it reaches the sewage network and the treatment plant is not long enough for it to disintegrate. This causes it to get caught up on the arrival grids at the EDAR and in the pumps, especially in the rainy season. From there, after removal, this waste is taken to the dumps.

This habit may result in serious damage not only to interior installations and hydraulic infrastructures but also to the environment. The pumps which pump the waste water in the treatment plants may stop working and, in extreme cases, the plant could even be rendered out of service. Lastly, the operators working at these installations and on the sewage networks are subjected to major occupational risks when they are required to unblock pipes, pumps or other parts of the network.

Canal de Isabel II estimates that the additional costs of this waste to the sewage network amounts to an annual average of 2.2 million Euros. This figure includes the costs of removing the waste, the additional costs of labour for cleaning the pumps, the replacement of the parts which are rendered inoperative and the increase in the energy bill.

STRATEGIC COMMITMENT TO WASTE WATER TREATMENT AND THE CARE OF THE RIVERS

Canal, in its Strategic Plan 2018-2030, includes, under the strategic line for the promotion of environmental quality, a plan of excellence in waste water treatment, *Nuestros ríos sanos (Our healthy rivers)*, which takes its environmental commitment beyond mere compliance with current legislation. It will carry out measures including EDAR modelling programmes for improving the quality of effluents or a plan for improving the control of industrial effluents to the network.

Canal de Isabel II was founded more than 165 years ago to supply water to the city of Madrid, and currently more than 2500 employees work to provide services to more than 6 million people in the region. It is an innovative company, a leader in its sector, and internationally recognised for its management of the integrated water cycle. It operates 13 reservoirs; 78 spring tapplings; 14 drinking water treatment plants; 17,556 kilometres of conveyance and distribution channels; 131 pumping stations for drinking water and 133 for waste water; 14,956 kilometres of sewage networks; 65 storm tanks; 877 kilometres of sewers and outfalls; 157 waste water treatment stations; and 588 kilometres of reclaimed water channels.