



By Amy Blaney

Claddagh Beach, located behind Nimo pier in Galway city has become a non-intentional dumping ground for flushed wet wipes. Along the long walk in the Claddagh, there are visible spots of sewage leaking into the water. With the help of the strong current in the area, the majority of these wipes are deposited on the nearest beach, which is Claddagh Beach.

Sharon arrived with her six dogs and introduced each of them by name. The keen animal lover quickly began to pick rubbish off the beach with her companions by her side. They were very visibly enjoying the salty fresh air of the beach, digging their noses into the mucky wipe infested seaweed.

Sharon Shannon is a successful Irish musician and member of the Claddagh Beach Volunteer Clean-Up Group. The group regularly clean-up the beach and raise awareness of the wet wipe problem on Claddagh Beach.

Along the sand, the sea deposited its seabed in tangled ropes of green and brown salty seagrass. Beer cans, pieces of clothing, take away containers and fishing line were the obvious contenders mixed up in the mess, making the beach their home.



On a closer look, the washed-up baby seaweed was interlaced with hundreds of wet wipes, sprouting up through the soft material. The white colour of the wipes had become masked by the brown life growing through it. The eroded polyester fabric of the wipes had become the dog's modern beach.

The wet wipe problem on Claddagh Beach has not arisen over night. Wipes in different stages are scattered all over the beach and buried heavily in the sand.

The older wipes were hardly recognisable. Most had lost their shape, broke easily when pulled from the ground, and resembled pieces of rope. The newly washed-up wipes, tangled in the seaweed still held their elasticity and shape. Some looked like they only came out of the packet yesterday.

At the back of the beach, Sharon's dogs rooted up the grass, like dogs do. She pointed out that underneath the grass lay hundreds of wipes buried in the clay. The wipes were interwoven with sand which created a bed beneath the sand dunes. As Sharon pulled back a small patch of grass that her dog was digging, she pulled up the hidden tips of wipes protruding out from the clay. Unseen to the



millennial eye, the tips were camouflaged in the sand, buried deeper and deeper in layers every time the tide came in. The sprouting, fresh grass lay in a bed of flushed wet wipes.

The Claddagh Beach Clean-Up Volunteer group was set up over a year ago by upset residents. The group frequently clean the beach, bagging and removing wipes and rubbish washed up on

the beach. Sharon admits, “some days there could be 12 people cleaning the beach, and other days one person might do it while out for a walk”.

Sharon says she became aware of the problem on the beach over a year ago when it was a lot worse, “it was like a thick carpet of them then. At one stage we picked up thousands of wipes and got the attention of the city council”, she said.

Since then the group have bagged hundreds of wets wipes. “The council came down and seen it with their own eyes and were very surprised. The wipes are coming in so quickly, it’s almost impossible to keep up with it because they’re coming in so fast”, She added.

Over the last nine months the group have refrained from picking up any more wipes to try raise awareness of the situation on Claddagh Beach. A lot of wipes companies promote wipes as flushable, which has raised concerns for the group who have picked-up hundreds of these flushed wipes. “It would be great if the council could fund an awareness campaign to show people what flushing wipes is doing to Claddagh Beach”, said Sharon.

Back in November 2019, the Galway City Council along with Irish Water removed 90 tonnes of wipes and seaweed from the beach. Five months later, the beach is covered in wipes again.

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