

Toilet Paper 101

What do you know about toilet paper? Unfortunately, the toilet paper used in RVs is “special.” That is, you must use a special type of paper (not brand specific) to ensure that it will dissolve in the black tank. But I am jumping ahead so let’s start from the beginning.

RV Sewage Systems

Let’s focus on the black-water holding tank only for this discussion. That holding tank is normally located directly below the toilet. When you flush the toilet, the waste and flush water drops directly into the black tank— a simple and effective gravity-drop system. A few RVs are manufactured with a “pumping-type” toilet that has to pump the waste from the toilet horizontally a short distance to the tank—with this, you no longer have a simple gravity-drop system plus you have a system that will use a lot of water. This is not conducive to extensive boondocking.

Your RV’s black tank works like the septic tank system found in homes that are not hooked up to a municipal sewer system. That is, the waste and water from the flush goes into a holding tank where it breaks down. (At a house, this holding tank is called the “septic tank” and in the RV, it’s called the “black tank.”) For a home, it is slowly leached or dissolved into the earth. For an RV, you must physically “dump” or empty the black tank when it is nearly full.

The size of the black tank is directly proportional to the size of the RV. Simply, the larger the RV, the larger the black tank. Now, the larger the black tank, the longer you can go without dumping. This is part of your RV being “self-contained” or fully usable without being “hooked up” or connected to utilities.

RV Toilet Paper

The toilet paper designed for use in RVs is manufactured so that it “breaks down” or dissolves easily and rapidly. There are two different “messages” to look for on the packages of toilet paper that indicates it will be okay to use it in an RV. One, and

the most obvious, is something like, “Safe for RV use” or similar statement. The other message is more subtle and is usually something like, “Safe for Septic Systems.” The rule of thumb is that if the toilet paper is safe for use in home septic systems it will be okay in RVs.

Toilet paper branded and sold specifically for RVs is available at many RV dealers, camping supply stores, and some retail stores. Wal-Mart also carries it.

This paper is packaged and promoted specifically for RVs. One important note is that this “specialty” toilet paper is always higher priced than paper in the grocery store. However, since you do not need the specialty paper (assuming you buy the “Safe for Septic Systems” brands), you can save money by purchasing toilet paper at the grocery store for use in your RV. One brand that **should NOT** be used in RVs is Charmin®.

TPBDT (Toilet Paper Break Down Test)

If there is ever any question about whether some toilet paper can be used in an RV, try this...

- A. Using a regular clear water glass (about 12 oz.), fill it half-full of water.
- B. Drop in a couple of **clean** pieces of toilet paper.
- C. With one hand on top of the glass to seal it and the other on the bottom, shake the glass two times vigorously—but no more. Set the glass down.
- D. Look to see if the toilet paper has dissolved / disintegrated.

If so, that toilet paper is probably safe to use in your RV. If the sheets of paper are still in large pieces, don't use it.

Disposal Process for Used Toilet Paper

Okay, if you think I've gone off the deep end by addressing this topic, you would be wrong. In our seminars and our vendor booth at RV shows and rallies, we have frequently been told by RVers (newbie's and experienced ones) that they never flush their “used” toilet paper down the toilet. Nearly all have told us they put it in a plastic bag and take it out with the trash. I'm serious here!

I've asked them why and I've been told things like...

- They didn't trust the black tank.

- They thought it was unsanitary to carry the used toilet paper with them even in the black tank.
- They didn't think they were supposed to put toilet paper in the toilet.
- Their friends taught them to do it that way.

I'm really serious here! Is this nuts or what?

I know they think they are doing the right thing but it just isn't necessary. The flush system and holding (black) tank is designed for efficient usage. Rarely is there a problem. Just use plenty of flush water. Everything will be fine. This particular RV operation has been in place for decades on RVs.

Correct Disposal Process for Used Toilet Paper

This is easy... flush it down the toilet, period. That's all you have to do—just like at home. Don't save it, package it, wrap it, or travel with it in some bag. Just flush it down the toilet. That's exactly what the toilet was designed to do and exactly what the black tank is for. The system works and works well. Use it—yes, of course, with the correct paper we discussed at the beginning of this article.