(English version)

Question for written answer E-002743/26
to the Commission
Beatrice Timgren (ECR)
(2 July 2026)

Subject: Clarification regarding the legality and proportionality of the SUPD Guidelines

Wet wipes are an essential product for millions of consumers. They provide hygiene solutions for families, infants, elderly people and persons with disabilities. This sector plays an important role in the European economy, supporting manufacturing, innovation and thousands of jobs.

The guidelines on the costs of cleaning up litter under the Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD) suggest that the scope of litter clean-up costs may include the cleaning of waste water infrastructure. The guidelines, which should merely interpret legislation and not extend its scope, go beyond the SUPD, which never refers to such costs. This document creates uncertainty for national authorities and economic operators, while imposing costs on industries and families that were never subject to an impact assessment.

Can the Commission clarify the following:

1. Did the Commission conduct an impact assessment of the impact of the guidelines on industry and on the affordability of essential hygiene products, particularly for families with young children?

2. Did the Commission assess the proportionality of the measure, considering that infrastructure maintenance costs exist regardless of wet wipes?

3. How do these guidelines align with the current Commission's simplification agenda?

Submitted: 2.7.2026

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(25 August 2026)

The Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUPD) ([1]) aims to prevent and reduce the impact of certain single-use plastic products on the environment and human health.

Article 8 requires Member States to establish extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes in line with the polluter-pays principle. For wet wipes, these cover litter clean-up costs.

The Guidelines ([2]) do not amend the SUPD but clarify its application. As such, no impact assessment additional to that of the SUPD ([3]) is required. Member States were consulted.

The Guidelines consider 'littering' to include indirect disposal into air, land or water where there is a risk of pollution.

Sewer systems are not closed systems: overflows and leakages can release wet wipes into rivers and seas. Flushing them is an indirect pathway of littering, and their removal constitutes litter clean-up.

As regards proportionality, producers have to cover only costs attributable to littered wet wipes, not ordinary maintenance. National EPR schemes assess and allocate these costs using representative data. Fewer flushed or littered wipes should therefore reduce costs covered by EPR-fees.

Waste operators ([4]) report that the wipes require staff time and resources beyond normal maintenance. Without EPR, these additional costs would ultimately be borne by the public. Their coverage by producers reflects the polluter pays principle.

([1]) Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, OJ L 155, 12.6.2019.

([2]) Commission Notice — Commission guidelines laying down criteria on the costs of cleaning up litter in accordance with Article 8(4) of Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, OJ C, C/2025/5646, 24.10.2025.

([3]) Commission Staff Working Document Impact Assessment Reducing Marine Litter: action on single use plastics and fishing gear, accompanying the document Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2018)254&lang=en.

([4]) For example, in France wet wipes are estimated to represent 80% of waste found at wastewater treatment plants and their collection and treatment to cost around 500 million euros per year (https://www.ofcc.fr/articles/risque-lingettes-dans-les-reseaux#:~:text=En%20France%2C%20les%20lingettes%20repr%C3%A9sentent%2080%20%25%20des,un%20co%C3%BBt%20d%27environ%20500%20millions%20d%27euros%20par%20an).
In Spain, the annual cost of clearing wet wipes from sewer and purification systems is estimated to amount to around EUR 230 million, according to figures from the Spanish Association of Water Supply and Sanitation, (https://www.euronews.com/2025/05/30/spain-wants-to-ban-people-from-flushing-wet-wipes-and-make-manufacturers-pay-for-the-clean)
Environmental & economic costs of single-use menstrual products, baby nappies and wet wipes from Zero Waste Europe et al. (2019) (https://zerowasteeurope.eu/library/the-environmental-economic-costs-of-single-use-menstrual-products-baby-nappies-wet-wipes/).

Mandated by Article 8(4), the Guidelines support harmonised implementation limiting burdens for companies in Member States.