
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Down the pan

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Helen

Hello and welcome to The English We Speak. I'm Helen and joining me today is Neil.

Neil

Hello everyone. You know my friend Jeff the documentary maker?

Helen

Oh yeah.

Neil

Well he had this great story he was about to make a film about - the most expensive wedding in the UK.

Helen

So what happened? Has he finished it?

Neil

He was due to film the wedding on Saturday. Then yesterday, he got a call from the bride.

Helen

Don't tell me the wedding is off.

Neil

It is. After all that hard work, everything just went down the pan.

Helen

Went down the pan? What pan?

Neil

It's an expression we use informally to say something disastrous has happened. It's not the cooking pan we are referring to here. It's actually the toilet!

Helen

The toilet! Oh yuck!

Neil

Just imagine, when you flush the toilet, everything gets washed down the pipe. That's what I mean – 'down the pan', everything's gone! Total disaster! Here are a few examples:

Examples

Jason had great dreams of becoming a football player, but they went down the pan when he broke his leg.

I'm afraid all that careful preparation we did for Jemma's surprise birthday party went down the pan when her brother told her about it.

He was ready to move into his new home, but everything went down the pan when the fire destroyed the house last night.

Helen

I get it. If things are going completely wrong and a lot of effort is wasted we can use the phrase 'down the pan'.

Neil

That's right. Er, Helen, I think you forgot to press the record button on this programme.

Helen

Oh no. What a disaster. Neil, would you mind re-recording this?

Neil

(Sigh). Helen, that's my tea break down the pan.