

Medication Disposal Guide

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The age-old advice of flushing unwanted pharmaceuticals down the toilet or drain is now considered to be the least desirable of all alternatives. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are generally not designed to treat pharmaceutical waste.

Recent U.S. Geological Survey studies have found traces of painkillers, estrogen, antidepressants, blood pressure medicine, etc. in water samples from 30 states, potentially causing significant problems to humans and domestic and wild animal populations.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency asks residents to take waste pharmaceuticals to dedicated medication collection locations or household hazardous waste collection facilities.

These include over-the-counter and prescription medications in the form of pills, liquids, creams and aerosols, as well as drugs prescribed for pets. Call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service and ask if a drug take-back program is available in your community.

But what if a collection program doesn't exist in your area? Federal and State guidelines recommend disposing of your unused pharmaceuticals in the trash, after following a specific procedure.

By taking these few small steps to dispose of your unused medications properly, you will make a huge impact in safeguarding lives and protecting the environment.

There are certain used medications for which the Food & Drug Administration does recommend flushing. *

DO NOT FLUSH unused medications.*

DO NOT POUR them down a sink or drain.

Dispose of unused medication in household trash as follows, rendering medications unattractive to children, pets, or thieves:

- Pour medication into a sealable plastic bag. If medication is a solid (pill, capsule, etc.), crush it or add water to dissolve it.
- Add kitty litter, sawdust, or coffee grounds to the plastic bag.
- Seal the plastic bag and hide it in the trash.
- Remove and destroy all identifying personal information from medication containers before recycling or throwing them away.

Resources:

SMARxT Disposal Campaign (includes a video demonstration):
www.smarxtdisposal.net

Illinois EPA fact sheet:
<http://www.epa.state.il.us/medication-disposal/facts.html>

Illinois EPA Household Hazardous Waste collections:
<http://www.epa.state.il.us/land/hazardous-waste/household-haz-waste/hhwc-schedule.html>

Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs (Federal Guidelines 10/09):
http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip_disposal.pdf

* The FDA recommends flushing of CERTAIN unused medicines:
www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm

Albuterol Inhalers: Time to Transition
www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/albuterol053008.html