



## Don't Flush Your Waste Drugs!

Disposal of unused or unwanted pharmaceuticals is an emerging and complex environmental issue.

According to an Associated Press investigation reported in early 2008, “A vast array of pharmaceuticals — including antibiotics, anti-convulsion, mood stabilizers and sex hormones — have been found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans.”

Waste pharmaceuticals include a wide variety of items, including over-the-counter and prescription medications. These wastes come in the form of solid pills and capsules, creams, liquids and aerosols. Many pharmaceuticals intended for pets are similar or identical to those prescribed to humans and should be treated exactly the same.

A recent United States Geological Survey study found traces of painkillers, estrogen, antidepressants, blood-pressure medicines, etc. in water samples from 30 states. Some of these components end up in our lakes, streams, and water supplies.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “The improper disposal of unused medications by flushing them or pouring them down the drain may be harmful to fish, wildlife and their habitats.” Studies have linked hormone exposure to reproductive defects in fish, and environmental exposure to antibiotics to the development of drug-resistant germs.

### **Don't Flush!**

The age-old advice of flushing pharmaceuticals down the toilet is now considered to be the least desirable of all alternatives. For years, many households and businesses have gotten into the habit of flushing waste pharmaceuticals down the toilet or pouring them down the drain because it is low cost and appears to be the simplest way to prevent unintended use or other diversion. However, wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are generally not designed to treat pharmaceutical waste. **So don't flush your waste drugs!**

### **So What Should You Do?**

**REDUCE** pharmaceutical waste whenever possible:

- Use all antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor. Not using all doses of an antibiotic could lead to development of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria.
- Buy only as much as can reasonably be used before the expiration date. For example, don't buy 500 aspirin just because it's cheaper, unless you will use them all.
- When your doctor prescribes a new medication, ask the doctor to prescribe only enough to see if the medication will work for you and in the lowest dose advisable. That way, if the medication doesn't suit you, there is less to waste. Do the same for your pet's medications.

## **How to Dispose Of Drugs Safely**

The following guidelines are for households and individual consumers only!

**The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that if there is no collection event in your area, dispose of drugs in your household trash. Before placing in the trash, follow these steps:**

- To avoid accidental or intentional misuse of drugs, treat medications (liquids and pills) by adding water and then salt, ashes, dirt, cat litter, coffee grounds, or another undesirable substance.
- Hide all medications in an outer container, such as sealable bag, box or plastic tub to prevent discovery and removal from the trash. Seal the container with strong tape.
- Discarded drugs should not be concealed in food. This will prevent consumption by scavenging humans, pets or wildlife.
- Dispose of drugs as close to your trash collection day as possible to avoid misuse.

**Note:** Be careful when handling medications since some drugs can cause harm if handled by people other than those to whom they were prescribed. Also, avoid crushing pills as some medications can be harmful in powder form.

**Medications self-administered by injection with a needle or "sharp" may also be disposed of in the trash.** If such medications include an attached needle, they should be placed in a puncture proof container, sealed with tape and labeled as "sharps." The New Jersey Hospital Association together with local hospitals offer a program to safely and responsibly dispose of syringes, needles and lancets generated in the home. Visit <http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/phss/syringe.pdf> for information on participating hospitals in Camden County. **Medications without an attached needle may be disposed of in household trash as described above.\***

\*The improper disposal of syringes or reusable hypodermic needles is regulated by State Law (N.J.S.A. 2A:170-25.17).