

Don't Drug Your Drain

Dispose of Medicines and Personal Care Products Properly

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If you're like most people, your medicine cabinet contains unused and expired medications and personal care products such as skin and body care items. You need to get rid of these unwanted items, but what is the best way to dispose of them?

Flushing medicine down the toilet or pouring unused liquids down the sink may have been acceptable and even encouraged in the past, but today we are discovering that using these disposal methods can harm the environment. Modern wastewater treatment plants are not designed to handle medications. If your home uses a septic system, the chemicals you flush or pour down the drain can leach into your local groundwater.

Disposal of pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) is becoming a complex environmental issue. Little is known about how even small amounts or mixtures of these chemicals can affect the health of people or aquatic organisms over time.

To avoid potentially causing harm to people, animals, or the environment, we need to dispose of these products responsibly.



Drug take-back event

The best way to dispose of PPCPs is at a drug take-back event. To give the public a way to dispose of unwanted medications, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has established the National Take-Back Initiative. For information about where and when events are scheduled, visit the DEA website at www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov and click on the "Got Drugs?" icon.



Also, some cities and counties provide locked drop boxes for disposing of unneeded prescription drugs safely. For a list of drop-box locations, visit <http://rxdrugdropbox.org/>.

Disposal in trash

Throwing medications and personal care products in the trash can be dangerous because people and pets may find and consume them. If you have no other options and must dispose of PPCPs in the trash, take precautions to destroy or make them undesirable:

- Solidify liquids by mixing them with flour, sawdust, or cat litter.
- Crush solid medications or dissolve them in liquid before adding them to sawdust or cat litter to make them unpalatable.
- Seal the mixture in a disposable container and place it in your household trash.

Local pharmacy or doctor's office

Some pharmacies offer “clean out your medicine cabinet” drives to encourage customers to drop off expired or unused medications and over-the-counter products for disposal. Ask your local pharmacy for options, but remember that pharmacies are not required to accept unused medications. Likewise, doctors' offices may accept such products for disposal but are not required to do so.

Waste reduction

- Buy only what you need and can use before the product's expiration date.
- Refuse samples from your doctor or other sources (store displays and mailing lists) if you do not expect to use them.
- Keep track of the medications and personal care products in your home to avoid buying more than you can use.
- Donate unexpired over-the-counter products to friends, family, or local organizations. However, never share prescription medications!

For more information

Drugs and Personal Care Products: Impacts on Water, People and the Environment. By J. L. Peterson, et al. 2014. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service publication ESC-010, 4pp.

“Pharmaceuticals, Hormones and Other Organic Wastewater Contaminants in U.S. Streams, 1999–2000: A National Reconnaissance.” By H. T. Buxton and D. W. Kolpin. 2002. *Environmental Science and Technology*, v. 36, no. 6, 1202–1211.

“Survey of Organic Wastewater Contaminants in Biosolids Destined for Land Application.” By C. A. Kinney, et al. 2006. *Environmental Science and Technology*, v. 40, no. 23, 7207–7215.

Acknowledgments

This guide was adapted from *Safe Disposal of Medicines and Personal Care Products* by Amy Millmier Schmidt, Mississippi State University, *MSUCares* Information Sheet 184.

Support for this publication is provided through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Integrated Water Quality Program, under Agreement No. 2008-51130-19537.

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Produced by Texas A&M AgriLife Communications