

Proper Disposal of Unwanted Medications

Keep medications out of the water supply

Don't flush your expired or unwanted prescription or over-the-counter medications down the drain or into your toilet. This includes anything that is meant to be swallowed, inhaled, injected, applied to the skin or eyes, or otherwise absorbed.

Chemicals in medications can end up in our rivers and streams, causing adverse effects to fish and other aquatic life. Humans can also be exposed as these chemicals can't be completely filtered out of the drinking water supply.

In 2002, the U.S. Geological Survey conducted the first nationwide testing on the presence of organic wastewater contaminants (OWCs) in water bodies. OWCs include medications, hormones and other contaminants.

Samples were taken from 139 streams in 30 states and tested for 95 compounds. Of the 139 samples taken, 80% had one or more OWCs present, and 9% had 20 or more present.

Guidelines for proper disposal

1) **Keep medication in its original container.** The label may contain safety information and the cap is usually child-proof. Scratch out the patient's name or use a permanent marker to cover it.

2) **Modify the medication to discourage consumption.** For solids (like pills and capsules), add a small amount of water, which will partially dissolve them. For liquids, add enough table salt, flour, charcoal or non-toxic spice to make an unsightly mixture. For blister packs, wrap the packages containing pills in multiple layers of duct tape or other opaque tape.

3) **Seal and conceal.** Tape medication container lid shut with packing or duct tape and place it inside an opaque container (like an empty margarine tub) so the contents can't be seen. Don't conceal medication in food products because they could inadvertently be consumed by wildlife scavengers.

4) **Discard the container in your garbage.** Do not place it in your recycling bin.

For more information

- For updates about disposal options, visit the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency website: www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw
- Find U.S. Environmental Protection Agency information on the potential environmental impacts of pharmaceuticals: www.epa.gov/ppcp
- See U.S. Geological Survey research on the presence of pharmaceuticals in the environment: <http://toxics.usgs.gov/regional/emc>
- Learn more about Metropolitan Council Environmental Services at www.metrocouncil.org/water/index.htm

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Sources: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. U.S. Geological Survey.