Safe Disposal of Prescription & Over-the-Counter Drugs

DO THROW AWAY SAFELY

What's in Your Medicine Cabinet?

- Over-the-counter medications you bought for a health problem you don't have any more?
- A prescription medication that you stopped taking because your doctor replaced it with another one or you felt better?
- Medications that have passed their expiration date?
- Medications used by people who no longer live in your house?

Don't keep medications that aren't useful anymore. Throwing them away safely will keep them out of the hands of people who shouldn't take them.

Unwanted medications have traditionally been disposed of by flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down a drain. While this removes them from your house quickly, it is not environmentally friendly: the medications travel through wastewater to treatment plants and septic systems – and from there into our groundwater, rivers, ponds and streams.

Fish caught near wastewater treatment plants have been found to contain residues of human medications, including those used to treat allergies, depression, elevated cholesterol and high blood pressure. Even at very low concentrations, some of these medicines have affected fish and other aquatic life.

Documented impacts have included:

- Development of female traits in male fish due to hormones like estrogen.
- Reproduction problems in shellfish due to anti-depressants.

Four Easy Steps to Proper Disposal*

1 Keep medicines in original containers.
Leave drug names visible to help identify the contents if they are accidentally swallowed. Cross out other personal information on labels to make it unreadable.

2 Disguise the medications in their containers.
Add some water or soda to pills to dissolve them. Add something inedible like cat litter, coffee grounds or dirt to liquids.

3 Close the lids and secure them with tape.

4 Hide containers in the trash.
DO NOT put them in your recycle bin OR put drugs in the trash without disguising them - scavengers may find and eat them.

**Unless the information sheet that came with your medication tells you to flush it down the drain. If you don't have the information sheet, visit the web site of the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, which lists drugs that should be flushed down the drain and provides advice about how to dispose of other medications: http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/default.htm*

Learn More Online

- **MassDEP**
  http://www.mass.gov/dep/toxics/ppc.htm
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**
  http://www.epa/gov/waterscience/ppcp/
- **University of Colorado Boulder Creek Study**
  http://bcn.boulder.co.us/basin/topical/haa/CU_vajda.html

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