



## DISPOSAL OF UNWANTED MEDICATIONS

For many generations, conventional wisdom has suggested that consumers should flush unwanted drugs. With advanced technology and recent research, however, low levels of drugs are now being found in environmental surface waters. In addition to discarded household medications, drugs from healthcare facilities, pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities, and farms are also being found in waterways. Most drugs pass largely unaltered through wastewater treatment plants and enter rivers and other waters.

A United States Geological Survey study undertaken in 1999 and 2000 found low levels of antibiotics, hormones, contraceptives, and steroids in 80% of the rivers and streams tested. Although health and environmental consequences are still being studied, it has been shown that male fish have been feminized when exposed to hormones, and other drugs such as anti-depressants and beta-blockers reduce fertility or affect spawning in certain aquatic organisms. Additionally, long term exposure to low levels of antibiotics can result in the evolution of, or selection for, drug-resistant microbes and bacteria. Expired medications can have these same effects.

Most community collection programs for household hazardous waste will not accept pharmaceuticals for disposal, but a Drug Enforcement Administration program called the National Take-Back Initiative, oversees local community pharmaceutical collection events for the disposal of unused household medications. These programs are advertised and promoted locally.

If a community pharmaceutical collection event is not available, unwanted personal medications should be disposed of in the household trash after special handling. Medications should be rendered objectionable by first adding water and then salt, ashes, dirt, cat litter, coffee grounds, or another undesirable substance. Avoid crushing pills as some medications can be harmful in powder form. Do not conceal discarded drugs in food to prevent accidental or intentional consumption by scavenging humans, pets or wildlife. Hide the treated medications in an outer container, such as a sealable bag, box or plastic tub to prevent discovery and removal from the trash. Seal the container with strong tape.

Medications intended for self-administration by injection with an attached needle or "sharp" may also be disposed of in the trash, but only if there are no other options available. Place the needles and/or syringes in a puncture resistant container such as a metal container with a lid, or a thick, rigid closable plastic container. Seal it with tape and label it as "sharps." However, it is preferred that medications with attached needles be disposed of at hospital-based sharps collection programs. All hospitals in New York State (except for federal facilities) are required to collect sharps from households.

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
NYS Education Department

**IMPORTANT MESSAGE**  
Help Protect New York's Waters

**Don't Flush** Unwanted Household Medications or Pour Them Down the Drain

**Return** to collection events where available  
or  
**Mix** with something undesirable such as coffee grounds, cat litter or dirt  
**Tape** up containers  
**Toss** in your garbage

For full instructions or designated collection events visit:  
[www.dontflushyourdrugs.net](http://www.dontflushyourdrugs.net)