

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

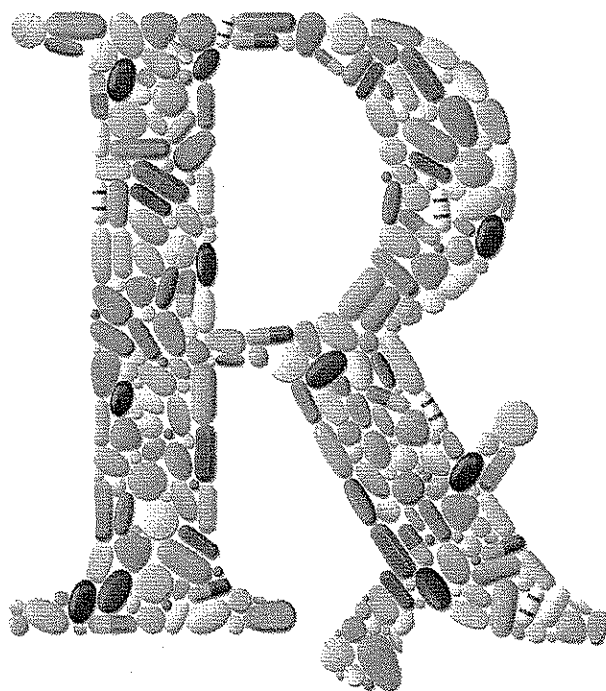
Return to collection
events where available

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



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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

David A. Paterson, Governor

Alexander B. Grannis, Commissioner

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DEC TELLS NEW YORKERS: DON'T FLUSH MEDICATIONS **New Educational Campaign and Website Launched to Help Protect Water Quality**

A new initiative to help reduce the growing presence of pharmaceuticals in water bodies is being launched today by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Commissioner Pete Grannis announced. The **"Don't Flush Your Drugs"** campaign and website, www.dontflushyourdrugs.net, will help raise public awareness and provide information about how to dispose of medicines properly to help prevent problems with water quality in the future.

Recent reports have shown that an array of medicines are showing up in our rivers and streams as well as in the drinking water supplies of a number of American cities. Though no New York community was singled out, these news reports indicate that pharmaceuticals -- including antibiotics -- can be found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans. The concentrations of the pharmaceuticals are small - far below typical medical doses - but studies have found problematic impacts on wildlife and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has acknowledged that the issue is a serious concern.

"It is critical that all New Yorkers do their part to protect the state's water resources," Governor David A. Paterson said. "While recognizing that the presence of pharmaceuticals in the water is a multi-faceted issue with no single solution or easy technological fix, all of us need to take precautionary action on the things we can affect immediately."

"This is an emerging environmental issue and the consequences are not yet clear," Commissioner Grannis said. "New Yorkers can help out by not flushing unused drugs and instead using alternate disposal methods. We recognize that we're now asking residents to change something that has been standard practice for years, but we know everyone wants to protect New York's water quality and public health."

"New York's public drinking water is of high quality, but keeping unused drugs out of our waters helps to maintain or improve that quality," said New York State Department of Health (DOH) Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. "Hospitals and other institutions can also help with these efforts."

(MORE)

“The State Education Department recognizes this emerging environmental problem and is working with the DEC to address the proper disposal of drugs.” New York State Education Commissioner Richard Mills said. “The Education Department, with the advice of its Board of Pharmacy and the pharmaceutical community that it regulates, will continue to study why so many dispensed drugs go unused and to determine appropriate strategies to insure that New Yorkers and their environment are protected.”

At least 24 major metropolitan areas in the U.S. have been identified by new reports as having pharmaceuticals in drinking water supplies. Philadelphia officials found 56 pharmaceuticals or byproducts in the city’s treated drinking water. Anti-epileptic and anti-anxiety medications were detected in a Southern California drinking water supply. Three medications, including an anti-biotic, were found in the water supplied to Tucson, Ariz.

Scientists say pharmaceuticals get into water by a variety of ways: individuals and institutions flush unused drugs, unabsorbed drugs pass through the human body, pharmaceuticals may not be completely decomposed in septic tanks, and drug manufacturers discharge pharmaceutical wastes. Wastewater treatment plants are not specifically designed to eliminate these types of chemicals, so treatment of municipal and industrial discharge is not the entire answer. Drinking water treatment plants also don’t necessarily remove all drug residues.

Under the new campaign, DEC will take pro-active steps to address the issue. These include educating the public about the potential hazards of pharmaceuticals in the water and about the proper disposal of unused drugs. This will include consumer guidance on DEC’s web site and education materials in pharmacies.

Instead of flushing medicines, New Yorkers should place their unused, unwanted or expired drugs in the trash, taking care to destroy or disguise them to avoid misuse or misdirection. Adding water, salt, ashes or coffee grounds to unused medications before placing them in the trash can further guard against misuse. Detailed instructions and suggestions are available on the new DEC website www.dontflushyourdrugs.net .

Other key aspects of the campaign:

- Governor Paterson has designated DEC to lead an interagency task force involving the state Departments of Health and Education to develop new guidance for pharmaceutical disposal practices at hospitals and other institutions. This task force will work with the institutions to ensure the guidance is workable and to spread the word about newly prescribed disposal methods.

(MORE)

- DEC and DOH will combine research efforts with EPA, the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) and other agencies. DEC, DOH and USGS have been working together since 2003 on monitoring contaminants (including pharmaceuticals) in the New York City watershed.
- DEC will encourage pilot collection programs for pharmaceuticals, either by pharmacies or local governments. To date, two counties and two drug stores in the state have held special pharmaceutical collection events. DEC will seek federal funding to create additional pilot programs and determine the feasibility of a statewide collection program.
- New York will urge the EPA to update and revise regulations for disposing pharmaceuticals and update water standards. Most states, including New York, do not have the resources to do this on their own and most of EPA's water quality criteria date back to the early 1980s.

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How to Dispose Of Drugs Safely

The following guidelines are for households and individual consumers only.

Where available, take your medications to a local collection event.

Contact your local pharmacy, recycling coordinator, or municipality to find out if there is a household hazardous waste collection* near you. While waiting for a collection event, keep all medications in a safe, secure place in your home out of reach of children.

- **Important information regarding *controlled substances*:**

To guard against unauthorized use of controlled substance medications, the NYS Department of Health must approve events that collect these substances. Before you take controlled substances to a collection event you should check with the event organizers to see if they are authorized to accept them.

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.
- Dispose of drugs as close to your trash collection day as possible to avoid misuse and/or misdirection
- Do not conceal discarded drugs in food to prevent consumption by scavenging humans, pets or wildlife

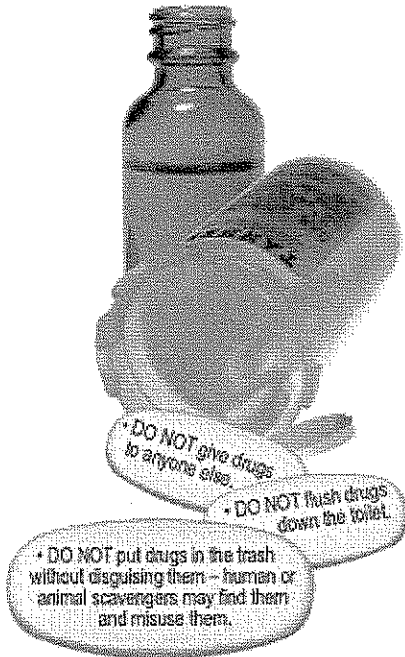
Note: Be careful in handling medications since some drugs can cause harm if handled by people other than those to whom they were prescribed. Also, avoid crushing pills as some medications can be harmful in powder form.

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." However, the state *strongly recommends* that medications with attached needles be disposed of at hospital-based household sharps collection programs. All hospitals in New York State (except for federal facilities) are required to collect sharps from households.

Medications without attached needles may be disposed of in household trash as described above.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Recommends Safe Disposal of Drugs



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Additional Resources

NYS DEC:

[Pharmaceuticals in Our Waters: An Emerging Concern](#) (PDF, 21 Kb)

[Pharmaceuticals as Emerging Contaminants: A Rationale for Reduction in New York State's Waters](#) (PDF, 96.6 Kb)

The following links leave the DEC website -

United States Geological Survey:

[Emerging Contaminants in the Environment](#)

[Pharmaceuticals, Hormones and Other Organic Wastewater Contaminants in U.S. Streams](#)

United States Environmental Protection Agency:

[Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products as Pollutants](#)

Indiana-Illinois Sea Grant College Program:

[Disposal of Unwanted Medicines: A Resource for Action in Your Community](#)

**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal Requirements**

I. Overview

6 NYCRR Part 360 Solid Waste Management Facilities (Part 360), defines the terms “solid waste,” “commercial waste,” “industrial waste,” “hazardous waste,” “household waste,” “household medical waste,” and “household hazardous waste,” and sets forth solid waste management and disposal requirements based on these categories. Similarly, Part 364 sets forth requirements for the transport of these regulated wastes. Furthermore, the Part 370 series sets forth requirements for the management of hazardous waste. Although the definition of “pharmaceutical waste” is not specifically identified in Part 360, Part 364, or the Part 370 series, such waste may fall within one or more of the waste categories listed above depending upon where the pharmaceutical waste is generated and the particular type of pharmaceutical waste. The Department has no jurisdiction over the management and disposal of DEA controlled substances; the management, destruction and disposal of this type of pharmaceutical is regulated by the NYS Department of Health.

II. Household Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal

Pharmaceutical waste disposed of by a household, including prescription and over-the-counter medications, are exempt from NYS DEC regulation and therefore may be commingled with the residential trash, regardless of whether it is technically classified as a solid waste or household hazardous waste. The Department recognizes that this method of disposal could potentially allow for inadvertent access of the drugs to children and/or animals during the disposal process. Therefore, the Department recommends that pharmaceuticals remain in their original container since the labels may contain safety information, and the container is typically watertight and child-proof. A small amount of water may be added to a solid drug or some absorbent material such as kitty litter, sawdust or flour may be added to a liquid drug. These measures are intended to discourage any unintended use of the drug. Once collected at the curbside, the waste is either brought to a landfill for disposal or a waste-to-energy facility for destruction.

Another option is to dispose of unwanted household pharmaceutical waste at a community household hazardous waste (HHW) collection event, if one is available. 6 NYCRR Subpart 373-4, Facility Standards for the Collection of Household Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Waste from Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators, contains the regulatory provisions for these events. Subpart 373-4 requires all waste collected at a household hazardous waste collection event to be disposed of at a facility which is permitted, licensed, or authorized to accept hazardous waste. The Department may under certain circumstances approve a variance request from that provision to allow disposal of the pharmaceutical waste portion of the household hazardous waste collected at a solid waste combustor.

III. Commercial/Institutional Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal

Hospitals, nursing homes, pharmacies, veterinarian offices, other clinical establishments and many other institutions generate pharmaceutical waste. There are no exemptions in Part 360 for the disposal of pharmaceutical waste by these facilities. Therefore, these facilities must separate hazardous waste pharmaceuticals from non-hazardous waste pharmaceuticals for subsequent management and disposal. Some of the pharmaceutical waste generated at these locations, primarily expired pharmaceuticals, may be sent back to a reverse distributor for management. However, it is the generators responsibility to evaluate pharmaceutical wastes to determine if they meet the criteria of being a hazardous waste, and if so, must be managed as hazardous waste in compliance with 6NYCRR Parts 370-374 and 376. For transport purposes under 6 NYCRR paragraph 364.1(d)(3), such waste is currently managed as a “regulated industrial-commercial waste.” A portion of pharmaceutical waste generated at institutions may be considered as a regulated medical waste (e.g., biologicals / vaccines) due to their constituents.

A pilot project at the Albany Medical Center characterized the pharmaceutical waste stream as follows (note that some pharmaceuticals fall in more than one category):

- 90% of pharmaceuticals are not currently regulated
- 4.8% are DEA or NYS defined controlled substances
- 4.4% are RCRA-regulated hazardous substances
- 3.2% are cytotoxic (chemotherapy) substances
- 2.7% are regulated medical waste