

News from the Watershed
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Proper Disposal of Unwanted Prescription Medication is Important for a Healthy Environment

Many people have prescription medications around the house that are either expired, no longer necessary or may have belonged to someone else. Whatever the reason, it is extremely important to follow proper safety procedures in disposing of these unwanted pharmaceuticals. Many of these medications contain ingredients that may harm our environment. These compounds are called microconstituents.

Typically, unwanted medications are disposed of by flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down the drain. Because these microconstituents are entering an aquatic environment via wastewater treatment systems, including septic tanks, they are causing problems because such systems are not designed to remove these contaminants from the water.

According to research done by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, some of the microconstituents, like synthetic estrogen may interfere with or modify hormone processes within an organism. Sedatives can affect or modify central nervous system activity. Antibiotics can lead to the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of harmful bacteria. Further research has shown that there can be effects on aquatic organisms like fish and frogs.

Since these pharmaceuticals are being found in our waters, more and more research is being conducted and ,more than \$300,000 in grants have been awarded by federal environmental officials in an effort to come up with ways to resolve this problem.

In addition, the Federal government has taken steps to inform citizens in the proper disposal of these unwanted medications.

The new federal prescription drug disposal guidelines urge Americans to:

- Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers.
- Mix the prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, like used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and put them in impermeable, non-descript containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags, further ensuring that the drugs are not diverted or accidentally ingested by children or pets.
- Throw these containers in the trash.
- Flush prescription drugs down the toilet only if the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so.
- Return unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs to pharmaceutical take-back locations that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for safe disposal.

The new guidelines, which go into effect immediately, will both help prevent abuse of these drugs, and protect the nation's water quality, according to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. "While EPA continues to research the effects of pharmaceuticals in water sources, one thing is clear: improper drug disposal is a prescription for environmental and societal concern," he said in a press release. "Following these new guidelines will protect our Nation's waterways and keep pharmaceuticals out of the hands of potential abusers."

By following these simple steps you will decrease the chances of a child or animal ingesting medications that may harm them and you will be assisting in the protection of the environment.

If you want more information on protecting our environment, visit our website at <http://www.highlandsswcd.org/> or give us a call at (863) 402-6545.