

What You Should Know About.....



Proper Discarding of Old Drugs

The average American takes more than 12 prescription drugs annually, with more than 3.8 billion prescriptions purchased each year. The most commonly cited estimates from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) researchers advise that about 19 million tons of active pharmaceutical ingredients are dumped into the nation's waste stream every year.

The EPA has identified small quantities of more than 100 pharmaceuticals and personal-care products in samples of the nation's drinking water. Among the drugs detected are antibiotics, steroids, hormones, and antidepressants.

The Associated Press reported that trace amounts of drugs had been found in the water supplies of 24 major metropolitan areas in 2008. Water piped to more than a million people in the Washington area had tested positive for six pharmaceuticals.

Unfortunately, the EPA does not require testing for drugs in drinking water and has not set safety limits on allowable levels. EPA's water chief, Benjamin Grumbles, told a Senate committee last year that there is still uncertainty about the potential effects on public health and aquatic life over the long term; however, the long-term exposure of drugs on humans, as well as on other species, is less clear.

As of this spring, concerns about pharmaceuticals in the water supply led the Office of National Drug Control Policy to amend its advisory, asking consumers to avoid flushing drugs unless the label or patient information specifies that method of disposal. In the past, consumers were advised to flush highly toxic medications and to blend other medications by mixing them with unpalatable substances, such as cat litter or coffee grounds. The new guidelines still describe the cat-litter method of putting drugs in the trash, but they also encourage consumers to make use of community drug take-back programs.

Discarding Tips



The FDA, The White House of National Drug Control Policy, and SMARxT Disposal advise consumers to follow the below tips on discarding of prescription and over-the-counter drugs safely:

- Always follow the disposal instructions printed on the drug label.
- Do not flush medications down the toilet or pour them down the drain if the instructions do not specifically ask you to do so.

If you throw medications in the trash, follow these steps:

- Take the medication out of the original container and pour it in a sealable bag or container.
- If the drugs are solid, crush them and mix with water.
 - Mix drugs with coffee grounds, cat litter, or any other unappetizing substance. This will stop curious children or pets from consuming the medication.
 - All identifying marks, such as prescription names or health information, should be scratched off drug labels before throwing them away.
 - If available, dispose of your medication at a drug take-back program.

