

## Flushing Drugs Down the Toilet or Drain Can Harm Our Surface & Coastal Waters Plus the People & Wildlife Around Them

**DO NOT FLUSH** unused medications and  
**DO NOT POUR** them down a sink or drain.

Traditional advice was to flush unused, unneeded, or expired medications down the toilet. That advice changed for almost all prescription medications. When you flush medications down the toilet or pour them down the drain, they flow through your community's sanitary sewer system to a wastewater treatment facility. Recent studies, using methods which detect low concentrations of compounds, show that municipal wastewater treatment facilities may not always successfully remove medications or their by-products. This treated wastewater is then released into local waterways where it may harm fish and wildlife.

### About the Partnership

SMARxT Disposal™ is a unique public-private partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the American Pharmacists Association, and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Branch of Environmental Contaminants  
(800) 344-WILD (9453)  
[www.fws.gov/contaminants](http://www.fws.gov/contaminants)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

American Pharmacists Association  
External Communications  
(800) 237-APhA (2742) ext 7537  
[www.APhAnet.org](http://www.APhAnet.org)

The American Pharmacists Association (APhA), founded in 1852 as the American Pharmaceutical Association, represents more than 63,000 practicing pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, student pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and others interested in advancing the profession.

Pharmaceutical Research  
and Manufacturers of America  
Communications and Public Affairs  
(202) 835-3460  
[www.phrma.org](http://www.phrma.org)

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) represents the country's leading pharmaceutical research and biotechnology companies, which are devoted to inventing medicines that allow patients to live longer, healthier, and more productive lives.



**SMART  
DISPOSAL™**  
A Prescription for a Healthy Planet

[smarxtdisposal.net](http://smarxtdisposal.net)

## A Few Basic Precautions Can Help All of Us Protect Lives and the Environment

## Common Questions

Follow your medication providers' instructions and use all medications as instructed. If you do not use all of your prescribed or over-the-counter medication, you can take a few small steps to make an impact in safeguarding lives and protecting the environment by disposing of unused medicines properly:

- 1) DO NOT FLUSH\* unused medications and DO NOT POUR them down a sink or drain.
- 2) Be proactive and dispose of unused medication in household trash. When discarding unused medications, ensure you protect children and pets from potentially negative effects:
  - a) Pour medication into a sealable plastic bag. If medication is a solid (pill, liquid capsule, etc.), crush it or add water to dissolve it.
  - b) Add kitty litter, sawdust, coffee grounds (or any material that mixes with the medication and makes it less appealing for pets and children to eat) to the plastic bag.
  - c) Seal the plastic bag and put it in the trash.
  - d) Remove and destroy ALL identifying personal information (prescription label) from all medication containers before recycling them or throwing them into the trash.
- 3) Check for approved state and local collection programs. Another option is to check for approved state and local collection alternatives such as community based household hazardous waste collection programs.

\* Flush prescription drugs down the toilet only if the label or accompanying patient information specifically instructs doing so (see the Office of National Drug Control's website at: [http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip\\_disposal.pdf](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/prescrip_disposal.pdf)).

### Q Why can't I just dump pills into my kitchen trash can? Do I really need to go through all those steps?

Unfortunately, when pills are thrown directly into the trash, it can lead to unintended exposure to people or animals. People may go through the trash to obtain unused medications or personal information found on discarded prescription bottles. The extra steps we recommend, including removal of personal information from medication containers, provide a safer method for disposing of unused or expired medications.

### Q I have medicines in my cabinet that expired months, or even years, ago. Can I just dump those down the toilet?

The expiration date on medications is the date by which a medication should be used to help assure its safety and full potency. We recommend you follow our SMARxT Disposal™ guidelines for disposing of expired medicines.

Important note:  
Never take an expired medication without checking with your pharmacist first.



### Q If I flush medicines down the toilet or pour them down the sink aren't they removed at the wastewater treatment plant?

New technology is capable of detecting low concentrations of chemical wastes, including small amounts of pharmaceuticals. These studies show municipal wastewater treatment facilities do not remove some pharmaceutical wastes and their by-products. However, studies show that those trace amounts have no appreciable risk to human health.

### Q How do pharmaceutical ingredients get into the environment?

Pharmaceuticals detected in surface waters come primarily from patient use. Small amounts of medicines pass through the human body without being completely metabolized and make their way into surface waters through the municipal wastewater treatment system. In addition, sometimes people flush unused or expired medications or pour them down the drain.

### Q What do we know about the impacts of medications found in water on fish and wildlife?

Many pharmaceuticals and their by-products have been detected in waters. Researchers are currently examining the potential effects of these compounds on fish and wildlife.

