

# Collecting Unwanted Household Pharmaceuticals

## Guidance for Organizers of Household Pharmaceutical Collection Events

### Introduction

Household pharmaceuticals include household prescription and over-the-counter drugs. These include but are not limited to pills, ointments, liquids, sprays, pre-filled syringes and injection vials.

Traditional ways of managing unwanted household pharmaceuticals, such as flushing drugs down the toilet, pouring them down the drain or throwing them in the trash, may be harming our environment and threatening public health.

Collecting unwanted household pharmaceuticals for environmentally sound management is one way to reduce the potential for harm. This collection requires careful planning due to the diversity of the materials and varied regulatory requirements that may apply. This guidance focuses on operation and management of collection events to ensure that they are managed in an environmentally responsible way.

It is important to know that under federal law, law enforcement agencies **must** be involved if controlled substances, such as Vicodin, Ritalin, Codeine or Valium are collected from households.

### Collection site safety

**Site set-up.** Adequate protection must be provided at any drug collection site to ensure no environmental degradation will occur. If a collection takes place outdoors, this may include placing tents over the collection area, putting down tarps or other groundcover as spill protection, covering storm drains, and storing collected waste in water-tight containers.

**Security.** If controlled substances are collected, law enforcement officers must be present and appropriate federal Drug Enforcement Administration regulations followed..

### Managing household pharmaceuticals at collection events

All waste must be removed from the collection site immediately after the event and taken to an authorized waste management facility or a law enforcement locker. A legally-authorized

transporter must transport the waste from the site to a permitted waste management facility.

### Controlled substances

These are drugs that because of their abuse potential are regulated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. DEA regulations require law enforcement officers to take possession of any collected controlled substances and to maintain possession of them at all times, including witnessing their destruction.

Controlled substances may either be segregated from non-controlled pharmaceuticals or combined with them. However, if they are combined with non-controlled substances, DEA regulations must be followed. DEA regulations do not allow a law enforcement officer to transfer custody of collected household controlled substances to a waste management contractor.

Collected household pharmaceutical wastes which are controlled substances or a combination of controlled and uncontrolled substances must be destroyed at a hazardous or solid waste incinerator. The incinerator's permit must specifically allow the destruction of pharmaceuticals, including pressurized pharmaceuticals if they are accepted.

### Non-controlled substances

Collected non-controlled household pharmaceutical waste must be incinerated at a DEQ permitted facility, such as the Marion County Solid Waste Incinerator at Brooks, or managed as a hazardous waste, at a permitted hazardous waste management facility.

### Other unwanted household health care items (non-pharmaceuticals)

#### Infectious Waste

Waste sharps are considered infectious waste. Sharps include medical equipment that may cause punctures or cuts, such as hypodermic needles, syringes with needles attached, lancets and glass medicine vials (empty or full). These include sharps which have never been used and are still in original



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packaging. They also include needle delivery medications such as Epi-Pens. If sharps are accepted, they need to be collected in a red sharps container and taken to a hazardous waste incinerator, solid waste incinerator or other waste management facility specifically permitted to manage infectious waste.

**Mercury-containing thermometers and medications**

These items must be separated from other wastes and managed by a mercury waste recycling facility.

**Collection partners**

If controlled substances are collected, law enforcement needs to be present and participate at each collection site. If no controlled

substances are accepted, law enforcement participation is not required; however, you may still want them present in order to make household participants more comfortable and to discourage theft.

**For more information:**

Contact Maggie Conley, DEQ Household Hazardous Waste Coordinator, Portland, 503-229-5106, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5106.

**Alternative formats**

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at 503-229-5696, or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696.