

Household Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

Land Quality Division

Solid Waste Program

811 SW 6th Ave.
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 229-5696
(800) 452-4011
Fax: (503) 229-6977
www.oregon.gov/DEQ/

Contact: Maggie Conley,
(503) 229-5106

This fact sheet provides guidance on disposal of waste pharmaceuticals generated at home, including out-of-date and other leftover prescription and non-prescription medications. This does not address disposal of waste pharmaceuticals produced at doctor offices, medical clinics, veterinary clinics, hospitals or care facilities.

Environmental concerns

Recent research shows that pharmaceutical compounds exist in our environment both as a result of improper disposal of unused medicines and because they are excreted by the person using the medicines. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems usually do not treat or only partially treat pharmaceuticals, so chemical compounds from these substances pass through treatment plants and septic systems to our rivers and groundwater. In one study, scientists analyzed streams for 93 different organic wastewater contaminants, including pharmaceutical compounds. One or more of the organic wastewater contaminants were found in 80 percent of the streams. The risk posed to aquatic organisms by long-term exposure to various pharmaceutical compounds is unknown.

Recommendations

- Do not dispose of pharmaceuticals down a drain or toilet.
- Do not burn household waste containing pharmaceuticals.
- Take waste pharmaceuticals to a drug take-back event, periodically sponsored by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency or other non-profit agencies.
- If no drug take-back events are available, dispose of waste pharmaceuticals in the trash.
 - (a) Take the waste pharmaceuticals out of their original containers.
 - (b) Mix wastes with an undesirable substance such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
 - (c) Place this mixture in a plastic sealable bag or a sealable container or tub, such as an empty margarine tub, especially if liquid.

- (d) Remove labels from empty containers and conceal any patient information with a marker.
- (e) Place the sealed container with the mixture and any empty pharmaceutical containers in the trash as close to garbage pickup time as possible.

For more information

Contact the DEQ solid waste technical assistant in the regional office nearest you. For a complete list of DEQ offices, locations, hours and phone numbers, see DEQ's website at: <http://www.deq.state.or.us/about/locations.htm>.

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.