



Pharmaceutical Drug Waste Disposal Guidelines

As the result of recent State legislation (SB 966 in 2007), the State Integrated Waste Management Board will be developing, with stakeholders, a model program for disposing of pharmaceutical drug waste. Model programs shall be available by December 1, 2008 and will not apply to controlled substances. The Merced County Department of Public Health, Division of Environmental Health along with other stakeholders will be developing a local pharmaceutical program after the State develops criteria and procedures for the implementation of the model pharmaceutical drug program.

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What is pharmaceutical drug waste?

Pharmaceutical drugs are items which are intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of disease in humans or other animals. Pharmaceutical waste is synonymous with drug waste, unused or expired medication, or unused or expired drugs, prescription and over-the-counter human drugs, veterinary drugs, diagnostic agents and nutritional supplements. Controlled substances (cocaine, narcotics, etc.) are not considered pharmaceutical waste.

2) Is it acceptable to flush pharmaceutical drugs down the sink or toilet?

No. Wastewater treatment plants may not remove pharmaceutical waste from wastewater before treated wastewater is discharged into groundwater or surface water.

3) What are the current acceptable procedures for disposing pharmaceutical drugs?

- Chemotherapy pharmaceuticals should be returned to the clinic that dispensed them.
- Ask your pharmacist if the pharmacy will accept old medicines back from patients.
- As the least preferable option, pharmaceutical drugs may be disposed in the regular trash following the procedures from the California State Board of Pharmacy:
 - Keep medicine in its original child-resistant container. Scratch or mark out the patient information on the label.
 - Place some water into solid medications, such as pills or capsules. Then add something nontoxic and unpalatable such as sawdust, kitty litter, charcoal or powdered spices.
 - Close and seal the container lids tightly with packing or duct tape. If discarding blister packs of un-used medicines, wrap in multiple layers of duct tape.
 - Place medicine containers in durable packaging that does not show what is inside (like a cardboard box).
 - Place in the trash close to garbage pickup time.



Don't Flush Your Medicines Down the Toilet!

- A recent study shows that 80 percent of US streams contain small amounts of human medicines.
- Sewage systems cannot remove these medicines from water that is released into lakes, rivers or oceans.
- Fish and other aquatic animals have shown adverse effects from medicines in the water.
- And, even very small amounts of medicine have been found in drinking water.

How to dispose medications at home

Follow these steps to protect your privacy and reduce unintended drug use, while saving the environment.



1

- Keep medicine in its original child-resistant container.
- Scratch or mark out the patient information on the label.



2

- Place some water into solid medications, such as pills or capsules.
- Then add something nontoxic and unpalatable such as sawdust, kitty litter, charcoal, Comet® or powdered spices (like, cayenne pepper).



3

- Close and seal the container lids tightly with packing or duct tape.
- If discarding blister packs of unused medicines, wrap in multiple layers of duct tape.



4

- Place medicine containers in durable packaging that does not show what's inside (like, a cardboard box).



- Remember to keep medicines away from children and pets.

- Place in the trash close to garbage pickup time.

5



Other ways to properly dispose of unused medicine

- Pharmacy Take-Back Program: Ask your pharmacist if the pharmacy will accept old medicines back from patients.
- Household Hazardous Waste Collection: Find the phone number of your local HHW collection site in the government section of your local white pages of the telephone directory.

Help reduce drug waste

- If you're not sure if you can tolerate a new medicine, ask your doctor about a 10 day trial supply.
- Remember to always take all of your medications as directed.