



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 5, 2007
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DID YOU KNOW? DON'T FLUSH MEDICATIONS.

Guidance on Proper Medication Disposal

Historically, recommendations to consumers included flushing unwanted, unused, or expired medications down the toilet. “Based on recent research findings and information from The Groundwater Foundation, new guidance is emerging that advises consumers to not flush unused medications,” explains Dan N. King, Environmental Health Specialist with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department.

Most Americans take some kind of medication, either a prescription drug or over-the-counter product, and use products such as lotion, cosmetics, laundry detergents, and cleaning products on a daily basis. These materials and other common household items, known as pharmaceutical and personal care products, or PPCPs, are now finding their way into water supplies. PPCPs commonly enter the environment through excretion by humans and domestic animals, disposal of unneeded or expired PPCPs by flushing them down a toilet or drain, bathing and swimming, discharge from municipal sewage systems or private septic systems, and other accidental discharge. There are currently no drinking water standards for PPCP compounds.

With the growing knowledge of the impacts related to unused or expired medications, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) recommends the following simple steps consumers should take to protect their families, community, and the environment.

1. Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers
2. Mix the prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, like used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and put them in impermeable, non-descript containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags, further ensuring that the drugs are not diverted or accidentally ingested by children or pets
3. Throw these containers in the trash
4. Flush prescription drugs down the toilet only if the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so

Evidence of the medications' potentially negative environmental effects has been documented

around the country. Scientists have found fewer male fish than anticipated in streams, and male fish with female reproductive characteristics. Many scientists connect these findings to endocrine disrupting chemicals such as detergent metabolites found in wastewater.

A nationwide study released in 2002 by the United States Geological Survey detailed trace levels of these chemicals found in prescription drugs in 80 percent of the waterways across the country. The breakthrough study checked for the presence of materials such as pharmaceuticals, antibiotics, sterols, hormones, and other compounds. Seven streams and groundwater in Nebraska were included in the study. Pharmaceutical chemicals enter the environment and can contaminate surface and groundwater in several ways. Since the medication is not fully metabolized by humans, the leftover portion of the compounds is excreted from the body as waste. As regulations on wastewater and municipal wastewater treatment facilities continue to evolve, communities are taking extra measures to protect community health and the environment.

For additional information, please contact the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040.