

FACT SHEET



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Unwanted Medicines

Office of Program Support

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Description:

- Keeping prescription and over-the-counter medicines out of the environment is an important way to prevent pollution.
- Pets and children can be poisoned from accidental ingestion of unwanted medicines thrown away in the trash.
- Proper disposal of unwanted medicines prevents illegal use or theft, including identity theft from discarded containers with patient information.

Environmental Impacts:

- Because wastewater facilities aren't designed to remove pharmaceutical chemicals, they could be discharged to streams and lakes in treated wastewater. These chemicals may remain in the environment for significant periods of time because they may not degrade quickly or completely.
- Current research is exploring the link between reproductive and developmental problems in fish and other aquatic wildlife living downstream from some wastewater treatment facilities.
- Aquatic species and their habitat can be adversely affected from unwanted/unused medicines flushed down the toilet.

IDEM's Role:

- The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) is responsible for protecting human health and the environment while providing for safe industrial, agricultural, commercial, and governmental operations vital to a prosperous economy.
- IDEM's Office of Program Support assists communities in preventing pollution and protecting Hoosiers and our environment.
- IDEM educates residents and communities about the impacts of pharmaceuticals on the environment.
- IDEM continues to work with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) to evaluate information about potential environmental impacts.

Citizen's Role:

- The [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration](http://www.dea.gov) (DEA) website has additional information about controlled substances and national [Take Back Days](#).
- Many local solid waste management districts help collect unwanted medicines as part of their household hazardous waste program. Ideally, if there is an unwanted medicine collection program in your local area, it is best to dispose of them through that program instead of in the trash. This assists in diverting unwanted medications from potential misuse or abuse.
- Citizens can take the following actions to help reduce the amount of unwanted medicines:
 - Purchasing only as much medicine as you need may help prevent unnecessary disposal of leftover medications that you no longer need.
 - Centralizing all medications in one location in your home may help prevent the over purchasing of products you already have;
 - Saying "No" to samples that you won't use means you won't have to dispose of them yourself later.
 - For medicines you might use, getting samples before filling a full prescription will allow you to avoid having to dispose of unwanted/unused medicines in the event you have a negative reaction to them.
- The following are guidelines for the disposal of unwanted medicines:

- Never pour medicines down the drain or toilet.
- Never give or sell unwanted or expired medicines to others.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if they'll accept unwanted or expired medicines. Many pharmacies offer for sale postage-paid envelopes which are used to mail in non-controlled substances for disposal.
- Take unwanted medicines to take-back events or special collections in your community.
- Properly dispose of medicine if a collection program is not available in your community by completing these four steps:
 1. First, dissolve tablets or capsules in the original container with a small amount of water. For liquid medications, add sawdust, kitty litter, or flour to the original container;
 2. Next, remove labels from prescription bottles or completely mark out all patient information;
 3. Then put all lids back on the containers tightly and put them in a heavy-duty, sealed bag;
 4. Finally, put the sealed bag in the trash so that it is not visible to prevent unintended use or contact.

More Information:

- Information regarding the Indiana Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force, including Take Back programs for unused controlled substances and links to Task Force partner sites and national experts, can be found at www.BitterPill.IN.gov.