

## Medication Education Disposal Solutions



Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

### **Please Do Not Flush Medications!**

Pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCP) can enter the water supply via sinks, toilets, or trash disposals. Many people dispose of human and pet medication either by flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the trash. These methods create the potential for harmful chemicals to end up in our lakes, rivers, streams, and ground water. An excess of PPCP in the water can harm the local aquatic ecosystem. The effects of pharmaceuticals can be observed in certain aquatic life, such as fish. Meds that are flushed down the toilet can end up in the water system and affect the environment. Meds that are thrown in the trash can spend years degrading into the soil and eventually make their way into ground and surface water. In addition to the effect on water, chemicals from medicinal waste can also end up in fertilizers used on the soil. Trace amounts of pharmaceutical-related chemicals have been found in finished drinking water sampling done recently by Illinois EPA. While there are no specific standards, these amounts are not considered a hazard to human health at the levels found so far, with additional sampling planned. However, with the increased use of medications, such as by the large boomer generation, there is the potential for greater concentrations in the future if preventive steps are not taken. Several organizations in Illinois have teamed together with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to create drug disposal sites within the state. These sites were created in order to provide **an environmentally safe method** of disposing of old, expired, and unwanted medication. Collection sites are located throughout Illinois. Some sites are available year round, others have an annual takebackday. For a listing of known disposal sites in Illinois, visit [www.epa.state.il.us/medicationdisposal/locations/index.html](http://www.epa.state.il.us/medicationdisposal/locations/index.html). Drugs are collected at the sites, sorted, and then sent to be incinerated. The sites accept prescribed medication and non-hazardous materials in the forms of pills, creams, liquids, and aerosols. The disposal sites are discreet and environmentally safe. The main goal is to reduce the amount of pharmaceuticals in the environment. Since their establishment, sites in Illinois have collected thousands of pounds of pharmaceuticals that have been safely destroyed. Incineration has proven to be the most environmentally friendly way of disposing of medication. The incineration process is held to strict EPA regulations, and is done in such a way as to minimize the effects of air pollution. This is also the only way to guarantee that harmful pharmaceuticals do not enter the water supply.

**If you do not have access to a disposal site, the IEPA recommends the following:** Throw meds in the trash instead of in the sink or toilet. To do so safely, crush or dissolve the medication and mix with an unappetizing

substance such as kitty litter or coffee grounds. Then place in an unmarked sealed bag or container, making sure to remove all identifying information. Make sure the medication is out of reach of children and pets.