



How to Dispose of Unused Medicines

Preferred Disposal

To address these concerns, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) worked with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to develop the first consumer guidance document for proper disposal of prescription drugs in February 2007. This policy was updated in April 2009 and the guidelines are summarized below:

1. Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information form. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless instructed by this documentation.
2. If no disposal instructions are provided, throw the drugs in the household trash.
 - a. Before throwing out a medicine container, remove or scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information.
 - b. Take medications out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance.
 - * For solid medications, add a small amount of water or other liquid to cause the pills or capsules to dissolve.
 - * For liquid medications, add coffee grounds or kitty litter to absorb the medication.
 - * For blister packs, wrap the blister packages containing the pills in multiple layers of duct tape or opaque tape.
 - * Unused ampules, vials and IV bags should not be opened (other than to scratch out the patient's name). Wrap the item with duct or other opaque tape to minimize breakage and then place in an opaque plastic container, such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub.

The medication will be less desirable to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through the trash.

- c. Put the medication that has been combined with the undesirable substance in a sealable bag, empty can or other container to prevent leaking into the garbage. The top of the container can be duct taped to the bottom of the container for additional security.
3. Do not give medications to friends. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history.

Other Disposal Opportunities

Some pharmacies are beginning to accept medications back from the public as a community service. Controlled substances (which are often prescription pain killers), however, can only be accepted under special collection arrangements due to federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) regulations.

Some hazardous waste collection companies offer special collection services for a significant fee.