



Disposing of Outdated Household Medication

The issue of proper pharmaceutical drug disposal is an emerging issue in the environmental arena. Household medications include over-the-counter drugs and prescription medication. These are often discarded because they are out of date or otherwise unusable or unwanted. If medications are flushed down a toilet, they usually go to one of two places – a septic tank or through a series of sanitary sewers into a wastewater treatment plant. This becomes a problem because sewage treatment plants are not designed to remove pharmaceuticals and many drugs may not be completely eliminated. Although the long-term effects to humans are unknown, some drugs have been shown to have effects on aquatic life. Disposing of medications in your septic system can also be harmful because they can disrupt the natural bacteria that keep your system running smoothly.

One option is to dispose of unwanted medications at a community household hazardous waste (HHW) collection program. If funding is available, the Pueblo City-County Health Department will host an HHW event. To obtain current information regarding upcoming events please call the Recycle Hotline at 583-4924. If it is feasible to hold on to medications until that event, it is the best option. If not, then please use the instructions below to safely dispose of your medication. Most medications can be disposed of without presenting a substantial threat to the environment with the exception of cancer treating drugs. Cancer treating drugs should be brought to a hospital for proper disposal because of their toxicity.

1. Remove medication from bottle and place into a sealable bag.
2. Remove names on medication bottles and discard of them as well.
3. Try and make the drugs as unpalatable as possible. In the sealable bag, add water to pills and then add a nontoxic spice such as cayenne pepper. Adding saw dust or kitty litter to liquids will absorb the liquid and discourage anyone from eating it.
4. Add absorbent material (i.e. paper towels) to the sealable bags. Sealable bag can also be placed into a box or brown bag to conceal the contents.
5. Place in the trash as close to garbage pick up time as possible.
6. Special care should be taken with liquids. Add oatmeal or kitty litter to the liquid to absorb it. Place in trash.

Please contact the Pueblo City-County Health Department Laboratory at 583-4318 for additional information or visit the FDA website at <http://www.fda.gov>

***Remember - Never give unused prescription medication to someone else as they may be harmful to the other person. You may be charged with dispensing medicine without a license.