



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
**OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY**  
Washington, D. C. 20503

April 6, 2007

Mr. Phil Bobel  
Manager, Environmental Compliance Division  
City of Palo Alto, Public Works Department  
PO Box 10250  
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Dear Mr. Bobel:

Thank you very much for your letter of March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, regarding the Federal government's new guidelines on prescription drug disposal. Director Walters asked me to respond on his behalf, as the member of his staff who was originally tasked with coordinating and developing the guidelines.

In developing the guidelines, we were guided by the overall notion that we should try to balance two important policy objectives: being environmentally responsible, and reducing prescription drug abuse. Briefly, our policy concerns were as follows:

- With respect to the environment, there is very good reason to believe that, as you noted in your letter, more prescription drugs in our waterways can be very harmful to aquatic life.
- Prescription drug abuse is the only category of drug abuse that is steadily increasing. It is now the second most serious drug abuse problem in the country (second to marijuana), with 6.4 million past-month illicit users of prescription drugs. National surveys indicate that about 60% of illicit prescription drug users acquire the drugs from family or friends, suggesting that many of these misused prescription drugs were unused, unneeded medicines that should have been disposed of in some way.

Your letter was specifically directed, in part, at the section of the guidelines that relate to flushing. In balancing out the two general policy concerns described above, we recognized that disposing of prescription drugs in the trash or through a "take-back" program would be environmentally safer than flushing (in the case of trash disposal, because all landfills are now bottom-lined), but would be an imperfect way of preventing subsequent diversion. There are several prescription drugs for which the risks associated with overdose or misuse are so serious or deadly that the FDA recommends disposal by flushing, to ensure that there will be no possibility of subsequent diversion. These are:

- Actiq (fentanyl citrate)
- Daytrana Transdermal Patch (methylphenidate)
- Duragesic Transdermal System (fentanyl)
- OxyContin Tablets (oxycodone)
- Avinza Capsules (morphine sulfate)

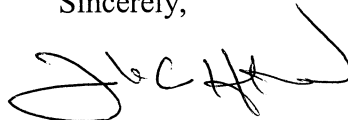
- Baraclude Tablets (entecavir)
- Reyataz Capsules (atazanavir sulfate)
- Tequin Tablets (gatifloxacin)
- Zerit for Oral Solution (stavudine)
- Meperidine HCl Tablets
- Percocet (Oxycodone and Acetaminophen)
- Xyrem (Sodium Oxybate)
- Fentora (fentanyl buccal tablet)

For all other prescription drugs, we recognize that trash disposal (or, where they exist, take-back programs) is a less certain means of preventing diversion or misuse, but nevertheless recommend against flushing in deference to our environmental priorities.

With respect to prescription drug take-back programs, the Administration is hopeful that data will emerge that indicates that these programs are effective in accomplishing the two policy objectives of protecting the environment and reducing prescription drug abuse. Should that data become available, I would expect that the Administration would be more likely to adopt a supportive stance regarding these programs, and we are certainly open to revisiting the guidelines at some point in the future. However, take-back programs do not exist in most localities; consequently, encouraging Americans to dispose of their prescription drugs through take-back programs would not be realistic disposal guidelines for most Americans at this point in time.

Thank you again for your letter, and as we continue to examine best practices related to prescription drug disposal, we will certainly retain your letter for consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should I be able to be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Horton", with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Horton  
Associate Deputy Director for State and Local Affairs  
(202) 395 6752