



Safe Medicine Disposal for ME

A UMaine Center on Aging project funded by the EPA

A study conducted in 2003 found that just over *half* of the people who are prescribed a medication finish all of it, and the rest have unwanted or expired medication in need of disposal.



Unused Prescription Drugs Are:

An Environmental and Health Hazard

- Over half of Americans dispose of unwanted prescriptions in the trash, one-third put them down the sink or toilet, and *only 1.4% return them to a collection facility*.¹
- Prescription drugs then enter the water through disposal down a drain or from the leaching or leaking of the drugs from landfills.²
- Over 80 pharmaceuticals of various prescription drug classes have been found in treated sewage, surface water, and ground water throughout the country.³
- Studies have found that exposure to medications in water has been linked to serious reproductive side effects in fish, and the full effect on humans is currently unknown.⁴



A Danger to Children and Pets

- Children and pets can accidentally ingest unused prescription medications found in the home.
- In the US, medications in the home account for more accidental poisonings than any other product.⁵
- Nearly 2% of children ages 12-13 intentionally misuse prescription drugs.⁶ Accessibility to the drugs is likely a contributing factor to this growing trend.⁷



A Danger to Older Adults

- Older adults make up only 13% of the population, but fill one-third of all prescriptions. This makes them susceptible to intentional or unintentional misuse, dependence, and addiction.⁸
- Diversion and theft of prescription drugs are currently at very high levels, and older adults make be particularly at risk.⁹

A Danger to Communities

- In 2002 in Maine, almost *90% of all drug deaths* were caused by prescription drugs.¹⁰
- The non-medical use of prescription drugs, among US residents ages 12 and older, is more common than the use of any illicit drug except marijuana.¹¹
- Maine DEA arrests for prescription drug misuse have increased dramatically to 16% of all arrests.¹²

A Waste of Valuable Health Care Dollars

- One small study conservatively estimates the cost of wasted prescription drugs by adults ages 65 and older to be *over one billion dollars annually*.¹³
- With health care costs rising at 3 times the rate of inflation, this waste will only continue to grow.¹⁴

For more information contact Safe Medicine Disposal for ME

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