

MEDICINE DISPOSAL GUIDANCES FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES

April, 2016

EPA

“The Agency recommends that, whenever possible, households utilize pharmaceutical collection and take-back events as the disposal option for their unwanted pharmaceuticals. For consumers without access to a pharmaceutical take-back event, FDA provides information on the disposal of unused pharmaceuticals and step-by-step guidance for disposing of pharmaceuticals in the household trash.”
Federal Register, Vol. 80, No. 186 September 25, 2015, as part of EPA rule-making on pharmaceutical wastes.

EPA’s website <https://www.epa.gov/hwgenerators/collecting-and-disposing-unwanted-medicines>, 04/04/2016.

The screenshot shows the EPA website's 'Collecting and Disposing of Unwanted Medicines' page. The header includes the EPA logo, navigation links (Learn the Issues, Science & Technology, Laws & Regulations, About EPA), a search bar, and language options (Español, 中文: 繁體版, 中文: 简体版, Tiếng Việt, 한국어). The main content area has a 'Related Topics' link for 'Hazardous Waste Generators' and a 'Contact Us' link. The page title is 'Collecting and Disposing of Unwanted Medicines'. The first section, 'What to do with Unwanted or Expired Medicines', explains that EPA encourages public take-back programs and provides a link to 'guidelines for household disposal of medicines (PDF)'. The second section, 'Information for Organizers of Take-Back Events or Programs', recommends incineration and provides a link to 'EPA's recommendation for incinerating pharmaceuticals from take-back events (PDF)'. The third section, 'Information for Hospitals, Pharmacies and other Businesses with Unwanted Medicines', states that these entities generally cannot use take-back programs and provides a link to 'rules for managing hazardous wastes'. Each section has a 'Top of Page' link.

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Collecting and Disposing of Unwanted Medicines

What to do with Unwanted or Expired Medicines

EPA encourages the public to take advantage of pharmaceutical take-back collection programs that accept prescription or over-the-counter drugs, as these programs offer a safe and environmentally-conscious way to dispose of unwanted medicines. This may be at a location such as a local enforcement agency, retail pharmacy, hospital or clinic. To find any available collection programs in your community, contact your city or county government's household trash agency.

As a second choice, the public can utilize EPA's [guidelines for household disposal of medicines \(PDF\)](#) (2 pp, 500 K, [About PDF](#)).

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Information for Organizers of Take-Back Events or Programs

EPA recommends that household pharmaceuticals collected during a take-back event or program be incinerated. EPA prefers that the collected household pharmaceuticals be sent to a permitted hazardous waste combustor, but when that is not feasible, at a minimum they should be sent to a large or small municipal waste combustor. For additional information, check out [EPA's recommendation for incinerating pharmaceuticals from take-back events \(PDF\)](#) (9 pp, 1.6 MB, [About PDF](#)).

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Information for Hospitals, Pharmacies and other Businesses with Unwanted Medicines

Hospitals, pharmacies and other businesses generating pharmaceutical waste generally cannot use take-back programs or events to dispose of expired, unwanted or unused pharmaceuticals. Public collection events typically do not intend to manage waste from businesses or comply with the regulations applicable to business waste. Healthcare facilities and healthcare-related businesses that generate pharmaceutical wastes are responsible for appropriately managing their wastes in accordance with all local, state and federal environmental regulations. This includes the [rules for managing hazardous wastes](#) if the wastes generated are identified as hazardous waste.

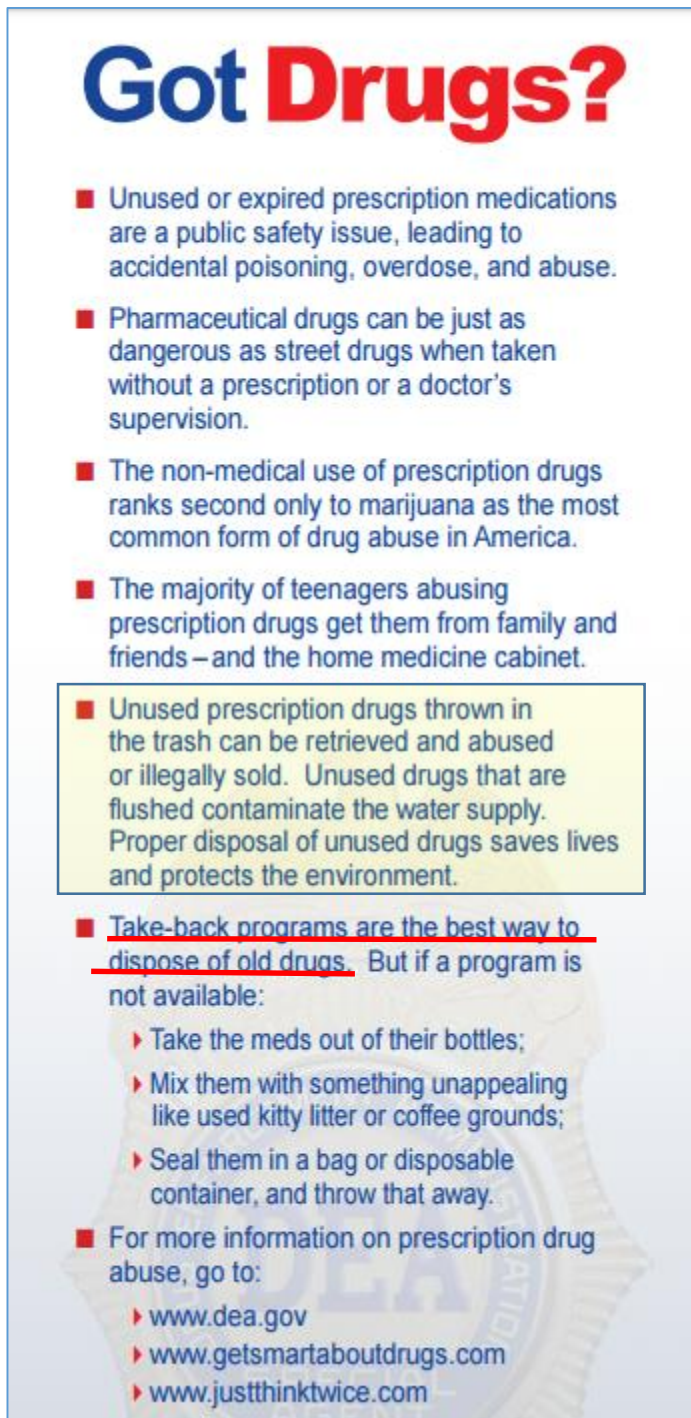
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April, 2016

DEA

DEA **Got Drugs?** Flyer for upcoming April 30, 2016 National Prescription Drug Take-Back Event.

The flyer is titled "Got Drugs?" in large, bold, blue and red letters. It features a list of bullet points in red and blue text. A yellow box highlights a specific point about drug disposal in the trash. At the bottom, there are three website URLs listed. The background of the flyer includes a faint, large watermark of the DEA seal.

Got Drugs?

- Unused or expired prescription medications are a public safety issue, leading to accidental poisoning, overdose, and abuse.
- Pharmaceutical drugs can be just as dangerous as street drugs when taken without a prescription or a doctor's supervision.
- The non-medical use of prescription drugs ranks second only to marijuana as the most common form of drug abuse in America.
- The majority of teenagers abusing prescription drugs get them from family and friends – and the home medicine cabinet.

- Unused prescription drugs thrown in the trash can be retrieved and abused or illegally sold. Unused drugs that are flushed contaminate the water supply. Proper disposal of unused drugs saves lives and protects the environment.

- Take-back programs are the best way to dispose of old drugs. But if a program is not available:
 - ▶ Take the meds out of their bottles;
 - ▶ Mix them with something unappealing like used kitty litter or coffee grounds;
 - ▶ Seal them in a bag or disposable container, and throw that away.
- For more information on prescription drug abuse, go to:
 - ▶ www.dea.gov
 - ▶ www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com
 - ▶ www.justthinktwice.com

The DEA wants to ensure that leftover prescription medicines that are controlled substances are destroyed so that they are **non-retrievable** by those who are addicted, and this is the disposal standard it requires for medicine take-back programs in its Rule for Disposal of Controlled Substances.

DEA has stated:

“sewering (disposal by flushing down a toilet or drain) and landfill disposal (mixing controlled substances with undesirable items such as kitty litter or coffee grounds and depositing them in a garbage collection) are examples of current methods of disposal that do not meet the non-retrievable standard.”

[Federal Register 79 \(174\): page 53547](#). September, 2014.

April, 2016

Drug Disposal Guidelines and Locations

The following guidelines were developed to encourage the proper disposal of medicines and help reduce harm from accidental exposure or intentional misuse after they are no longer needed:

- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the prescription drug labeling or patient information that accompanies the medicine. Do not flush medicines down the sink or toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.
- Take advantage of programs that allow the public to take unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your local law enforcement agencies to see if they sponsor medicine take-back programs in your community. Contact your city's or county government's household trash and recycling service to learn about medication disposal options and guidelines for your area.
- Transfer unused medicines to collectors registered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Authorized sites may be retail, hospital or clinic pharmacies, and law enforcement locations. Some offer mail-back programs or collection receptacles ("drop-boxes"). Visit the [DEA's website](#) or call 1-800-882-9539 for more information and to find an [authorized collector](#) in your community.

If no disposal instructions are given on the prescription drug labeling and no take-back program is available in your area, throw the drugs in the household trash following these steps:

1. Remove them from their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds, dirt or kitty litter (this makes the drug less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through the trash seeking drugs).
2. Place the mixture in a sealable bag, empty can or other container to prevent the drug from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.

