

# *Reduce access to prescription drugs to protect our children and our families*

In Montana, prescription drug abuse and misuse is a significant public health problem that has become a serious public safety concern. Nationally, Montana ranks *third in teen misuse* of prescription drugs. (Montana Attorney General, Steve Bullock)

***Prescription drug abuse is a serious and growing problem in our communities.*** Abuse of medicines—especially opiate pain relievers like OxyContin, codeine, Vicodin, Lortab, and Fentanyl—is increasing rapidly.

***The consequences are serious.***

Montana's Division of Criminal Investigation reports 42 percent of its 2009 drug cases were tied to prescription drugs, a substantial increase since 2003 when they only accounted for 7 percent of its case-load. The Missoulian Newspaper recently reported in a special series on drug abuse that ***“More Montanans die of prescription drug overdoses than any other kind, including illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine.”*** In 2009, the state recorded 141 deaths directly related to the abuse of four kinds of prescription pain relievers, according to toxicology reports at the state crime lab in Missoula. That's one death every 2.5 days. In another 324 deaths, painkillers were present but not necessarily the primary cause of death. Meth, by comparison, killed eight people in Montana last year.

***Our kids and teens are at risk.*** A recent study conducted by the federal government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that Montana ranks third per capita, and ninth overall, in teen

abuse of prescription pain relievers, with almost 10 percent of youths between the ages of 12 and 17 abusing the drugs.

***Our medicine cabinets are taking the place of drug dealers.*** Three in five teens say prescription pain relievers are easy to get from parents' medicine cabinets. Over half of prescription drug abusers get the medicines from a friend or relative. More than half of teens say pain relievers are “available everywhere.” (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

**Getting rid of unneeded medicines from our homes safely helps reduce access to drugs that could be abused.**

Flushing medicines is bad for the environment, and measurable amounts of drugs end up in down-stream drinking water. Throwing medicines in the garbage—especially drugs like OxyContin—is just not safe because it increases the likelihood that neighborhood garbage dumpsters will be searched by those seeking these drugs and that they will be obtained and used illegally.

***Medicine return programs provide a secure way to dispose of pain relievers and other unwanted medicines.*** Look inside for information about medicine return programs in Flathead County and for tips on safe disposal practices. Read more inside about how proper disposal will help protect the Flathead's water quality.



## **Recycling in the Flathead Valley**

This brochure was created by the  
**WasteNot Project**

A cooperative effort between  
Flathead County Solid Waste District,  
Flathead Valley Community College  
Service Learning Program,  
Flathead City-County Health Department  
and Citizens For A Better Flathead

Visit the WasteNot website  
**[www.wastenotproject.org](http://www.wastenotproject.org)**  
For more information on recycling and  
reducing waste at home & work. Call  
**756-8993** with additional questions.



Printed on 100% recycled paper  
Last updated July 2010

## *Pharmaceutical Waste: Disposing of Unwanted Medications*



***You Can Help:***

- ***Prevent Drug Abuse in your neighborhood.***
- ***Protect the Flathead's water quality.***

# UNWANTED MEDICINES IN OUR HOMES INCREASE RISKS OF POISONING, ABUSE, AND IMPROPER DISPOSAL WHICH CAN HARM WATER QUALITY

## *Dispose of unwanted medications properly to protect our water quality.*

Expired or unwanted prescription or over-the-counter medications from households have traditionally been disposed of by flushing them down the toilet or a drain. Although this method of disposal prevents immediate accidental ingestion, it can cause pollution in surface water, and ground water, which has been demonstrated to cause adverse effects to fish and other aquatic wildlife. When the water is eventually reused, it can also cause unintentional human exposure to chemicals in medications.



## *Tests to measure the presence of pharmaceuticals in groundwater in the Flathead Valley are currently underway.*

Northwest studies have found pharmaceuticals in surface water, groundwater, and marine waters, as well as soils and sediments. Similar studies have been done in Helena and in Missoula with similar findings.

Wastewater contaminants, including medicines, were found in 80% of 139 streams sampled in 30 states. Source: U.S. Geological Survey, 2002.

A 2008 Associated Press series published the results of a nationwide study that found

medicines in the drinking water of 24 major metropolitan areas serving 41 million Americans.

The environmental concentrations of pharmaceuticals are low; less than the recommended therapeutic doses for humans. A number of studies, however, are looking at these low levels of medicines, or combinations of medicines, and the impacts on aquatic organisms. Researchers have found changes in reproductive function, behavior, growth, and increased mortality from exposure to some medicines or combinations of medicines in aquatic organisms at concentrations found in the environment.

### Excretion of medicines and their metabolites from our bodies.

Humans and animals pass drugs or drug metabolites through their bodies and these chemicals pass through septic systems or wastewater treatment plants virtually unaltered. Wastewater treatment systems cannot effectively remove all medicines, and many are discharged to surface waters or are collected in biosolids that are often applied to land.

### Disposal of waste medicines to sewers or trash:

A significant amount of medicines go unused. When flushed down toilets or sinks, medicines can enter the environment because they are not removed or degraded by septic systems or wastewater treatment processes. Disposal of active pharmaceutical compounds in the garbage is a potential environmental concern because medicines might still be released into the environment. In addition, many are concerned about the misuse and poisoning associated with throwing narcotics and other medicines in the garbage, which may not be secure at the curb.

No one knows how much of the medicines in our environment comes from either of these routes, but the simplest approach to reducing the amounts is to adopt better disposal practices for waste medicines.



## Disposal Tips for Unwanted Medicines

**FIRST. Do not flush medicines down the toilet or drain.**

Flushing drugs adds to pollution in our waters because waste-water and septic systems are not designed to treat these chemicals.

**THE BEST CHOICE. Use community drug take-back programs for proper disposal.**

Flathead County hosted its first Medicine Return Program in June 2010, as part of Operation Medicine Cabinet. The County will now host annual events each year. Watch each spring for media announcements of this event or call the WasteNot Project at 756-8993 for more information. Montana is working with other

states for changes to federal rules that would make permanent drop-off sites at pharmacies or other easy to access facilities possible.

**LAST CHOICE. If a collection program for unwanted medicines is not available near you or at the time you need it, follow these steps:**

1. Dump medicines out of their container into a re-sealable bag.
2. Pour enough water into bag to let medicines dissolve.
3. Add an undesirable, absorbent such as kitty litter, coffee grounds or sawdust, and mix together.
4. Seal bag and place in a garbage container out of reach of children, pets, and in a garbage container where someone would not have access to easily look through your trash.

For more information visit  
[http:// www.epa.gov/ppcp/faq.html](http://www.epa.gov/ppcp/faq.html)

Note: The use of the term medicines in this brochure refers to a group of chemicals that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has more broadly defined as follows: **“Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products as Pollutants (PPCPs)** refers, in general, to any product used by individuals for personal health or cosmetic reasons or used by agribusiness to enhance growth or health of livestock. PPCPs comprise a diverse collection of thousands of chemical substances, including prescription and over-the-counter therapeutic drugs, veterinary drugs, fragrances, and cosmetics.” <http://www.epa.gov/ppcp/>