

# proper disposal of unwanted medicine

## what's the problem?

Unwanted and expired medicine may be a risk to human health and the environment if disposed of improperly.

Traditionally, expired or unwanted prescriptions or over-the-counter medicine from households were disposed of by flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down the drain.

## **DO NOT FLUSH!** This method of disposal is now discouraged.

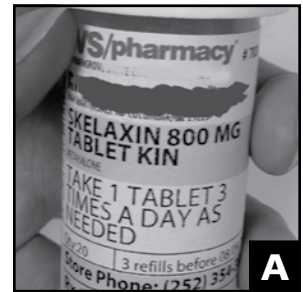
Keeping prescription and over-the-counter medicines out of the environment is an important way to prevent pollution. After being flushed or poured down a drain, many medicines pass through sewer and septic systems. Because these systems cannot always treat or remove the medicines, they may end up in streams, lakes and groundwater.

This can cause adverse effects in fish and other aquatic wildlife as well as unintentional human exposure to chemicals in the medications.

## here's what you should do at home ...

Remember, **don't flush**. Dispose of unwanted medicine in your household trash by following the steps below. They are important in protecting your health, the environment and preventing accidental use.

1. **Keep the medicine in its original container.** The labels may contain safety information and the caps are typically child proof. Leaving the content information clearly visible, cover the patient's name with a permanent marker. See Figure A.
2. **Modify the medicines to discourage consumption.** For solids, such as pills or capsules, add a small amount of water to the bottle to at least partially dissolve them. See Figure B. For liquid medicines, add enough table salt, flour or powdered spice (such as turmeric or mustard) to make a pungent, unsightly mixture that discourages anyone from taking it.
3. **Seal and conceal.** Tape the container's lid shut with packing or duct tape. See Figure C. Place it in a bag or container such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub to ensure that the contents cannot be seen. See Figure D.
4. **Discard the container in your garbage can.** Do not place it in the recycling bin.



**REMINDER! All medicine should be kept secure and out of the reach of children!**

## other disposal options

When possible, take advantage of pharmaceutical take-back programs that allow residents to bring unwanted and expired medicine to a central location for safe and proper disposal. Currently, however, there are no pharmacies in South Carolina that have take-back programs in place according to the S.C. Pharmacy Association.

The Richland County Sheriff's Department's "Take Back Medications" program offers its residents the opportunity to properly dispose of prescription drugs. Prescription drugs are accepted on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at five locations. For more information, visit [www.rcsd.net/media/apr08/04-09-medication.html](http://www.rcsd.net/media/apr08/04-09-medication.html) or call (803) 576-3000.

As the national discussion on the proper management of unwanted medicine continues, additional options for the management of unwanted medicine may become available. The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control will continue to be part of that discussion. Visit [www.epa.gov/ppcp](http://www.epa.gov/ppcp) for more information about the possible environmental impacts from pharmaceutical disposal. For more information about research on the presence of pharmaceuticals in the environment, visit <http://toxics.usgs.gov/regional/emc>.

## reduce unwanted medicines

- Buy only what you need.
- Centralize all medications in one location in your home. This will limit purchasing products you already have.
- Say no to samples that you won't use.



Many people have medical conditions that require injections at home. These needles, syringes and lancets (or "sharps") must be disposed of properly. This ensures that other people, especially sanitation workers, will not be "stuck" or cut.

"Get the Point" promotes a safe and easy way to dispose of sharps. Home-generated sharps should be placed in an empty bleach or detergent bottle and labeled with a warning sticker from DHEC. (For FREE stickers, call 1-800-285-5257.) Once the bottle is three-fourths full, the cap should be tightly secured and the bottle discarded in the trash.

### BE SAFE WITH NEEDLES

- **STEP 1:** Put a warning sticker on an empty bleach or detergent bottle.
- **STEP 2:** Place used needles or lancets in the bottle.
- **STEP 3:** Put the cap on the bottle.
- **STEP 4:** When the bottle is three-fourths full, secure the cap and throw the bottle into the trash.

For more information, visit [www.scdhec.gov/getthepoint](http://www.scdhec.gov/getthepoint).