

# Pollution Prevention Starts With You

Did you know that every day the average adult uses nine personal care products containing 126 unique compounds that could end up in our water? In addition to traces of products like shampoo, toothpaste, perfume, sunscreens, and cosmetics, minute amounts of prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs make their way into water. They should be limited or prevented from entering our environment.

Often the products we use and the medications we take are not entirely absorbed by our bodies. Any excess is excreted or washed off into our sewers, and then into our wastewater and surface waters. Moreover, many people dispose of prescription and over-the-counter drugs incorrectly by flushing them down the toilet.

Using advanced analytical equipment, scientists can detect these compounds in all types of water—groundwater, streams, wastewater, and drinking water. Comparatively speaking, these minute traces are as tiny as a pinch of salt in 10 tons of potato chips. While there is no evidence to suggest risk to human health, scientists can sometimes find interference with aquatic organisms, and studies continue. Meanwhile it's prudent to control what we put into water, and everyone's help is important.

Whenever possible, it's important to keep pharmaceutical and personal care products (PPCPs) out of our water. PPCPs include:

- Prescription and over-the counter therapeutic drugs
- Fragrances
- Cosmetics
- Sunscreen products
- Insect repellent
- Vitamins
- Veterinary drugs

PPCPs also include antibacterial hand and dish soap. According to a Food and Drug Administration panel, antibacterial soaps and washes are no more effective than regular soap and water at fighting infection in everyday use.

While some PPCPs are easily broken down and processed by the human body or degrade quickly in the environment, others are not. They can pass through sewers to treatment plants in very minute amounts and find their way into our creeks, rivers and streams. **Controlling what goes down the drain is the easiest and most effective way to protect the environment.**



## Help Keep Our Drains Drug-Free!

One important way consumers can help is through proper disposal of unused pharmaceuticals\* or over-the-counter and prescription drugs such as antibiotics, analgesics, anti-inflammatories, antidepressants, and oral contraceptives.

\*Source: The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy consumer guidance for the Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs at [http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/factsht/proper\\_disposal.html](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/factsht/proper_disposal.html)

For more information on how to dispose of household products, please visit:

<http://www.wef.org/AboutWater/ForThePublic/FactSheets/FactSheetDocuments/HouseholdWaste.htm>

## Proper steps for disposal of unused pharmaceuticals include:

- Don't flush prescription drugs down the toilet.
- Remove unused or expired prescription drugs from their original containers and throw them in the trash.
- Mix prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and put them in a sealable container such as an empty can or used plastic bag.
- Take advantage of community pharmaceutical take-back or solid waste programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal.
- Check with your local pharmacy to see if they accept unused or expired medications for disposal.

Consumers can help by carefully following product use and disposal recommendations, decreasing use when possible, and learning more about the products we use and how they impact the water environment and our health.

# Drug-Free Drains

You can help protect our water from pharmaceuticals and personal care products!



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