

# Household Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal



State of Oregon  
Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

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This fact sheet provides guidance on disposal of waste pharmaceuticals generated at home, including out-of-date and other leftover medications. This fact sheet does not address the disposal of waste pharmaceuticals produced at doctor offices, medical clinics, veterinary clinics, hospitals or care facilities.

## Background

When used as intended, pharmaceuticals applied externally or ingested have the potential to be excreted or washed into sewage systems. In addition, unused pharmaceuticals are often directly flushed to sewage systems. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems usually do not treat or only partially treat pharmaceuticals, so chemical compounds from pharmaceuticals pass through treatment plants or septic systems to our rivers or groundwater.

## Environmental concerns

Recent research shows that pharmaceutical compounds exist in our environment both as a result of improper disposal of unused pharmaceuticals and because they are excreted by the person using the medication. In one study, scientists analyzed streams for 95 different organic wastewater contaminants, including pharmaceutical compounds. One or more of the organic wastewater contaminants were found in 80 percent of the streams. The risk posed to aquatic organisms by long-term exposure to various pharmaceutical compounds is unknown.

## Recommendations

- **Do** dispose of waste pharmaceuticals, including chemotherapeutic wastes, in garbage that is intended for a permitted solid waste landfill or incinerator.
- Do **not** dispose of pharmaceuticals down a drain or toilet.
- Do **not** burn household waste containing pharmaceuticals.

While the best management of waste pharmaceuticals is disposal to a permitted solid waste incinerator, this disposal option is not widely available in Oregon. Disposal with garbage is convenient and readily available. Pharmaceutical compounds should break down over time in a landfill environment.

To dispose of waste pharmaceuticals in the trash, these basic guidelines should be followed:

- Keep waste pharmaceuticals in their original containers with their labels. (Remove, or conceal with marker, any patient information if you have privacy concerns.)
- Tape the lid on the container if it is not child-proof and there are children in the home.
- Place waste pharmaceuticals in a plastic sealable bag, especially if liquid;
- Place waste pharmaceuticals in durable packaging that masks the contents (such as a brown cardboard box) and;
- Place waste pharmaceuticals in the trash as close to garbage pickup time as possible.

## For more information

Contact the DEQ solid waste technical assistant in the regional office nearest you as [indicated on the map on the reverse side of this fact sheet.](#)

## Alternative formats

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696.

[\(Technical assistance contacts on back\)](#)

## Northwest Region

**1 & 2.** Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Multnomah, Tillamook, and Washington counties:

Leslie Kochan, Portland,  
503-229-5529;  
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## Eastern Region

**3.** Baker, Gilliam, Hood River, Morrow, Sherman and Wasco counties (including the Milton-Freewater watershed):

Bruce Lumper, The Dalles,  
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**4.** Crook, Jefferson, Lake and Wheeler counties:

Shari Harris-Dunning, Bend,  
541-388-6146, ext. 240;  
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**5.** Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Klamath and Malheur counties:

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**6.** Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties:

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## Western Region

**7.** Benton, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties:

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**8.** Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine and Lane counties:

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Inquiries from out of state can be directed to DEQ's Headquarters office in Portland by e-mail at [solwaste@deq.state.or.us](mailto:solwaste@deq.state.or.us) or by phone at (503) 229-5913, toll-free in OR at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5913

