

Proper Medicine Disposal Prescribed Daily

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Among many reasons not to flush medicines down the drain or throw them out with the trash is to prevent the chemicals from decomposing in soil and water supplies.

Chemicals are passed on to wildlife and humans consuming that water, and the chemicals may destroy important bacteria in soils and water that actually help purify those resources. To date, wastewater treatment systems are not setup to remove those contaminants, and that does not consider the runoff leaking directly into bodies of water or consumed by wildlife.

In an effort to halt flushing and tossing, the **National Association of Counties** has adopted a resolution the "Support of a Safe, Convenient Medicine Return Program" that places at least some of the responsibility of proper medicine disposal on the vendors supplying medicine to consumers. The Association is identifying non-governmental funds available to locate a pharmaceutical manufacturer who can collect medicine for proper disposal.

Similar functioning efforts, known as take back programs, are working throughout communities in America and Canada. In an era when nearly everyone is taking some sort of medication, popular prescriptions including anti-depressants, cholesterol controllers, and oral contraceptives, statistics are showing frightening rates of improper disposal. According to the investigative work conducted in informing the policy's reviewers and decision makers, medicine metabolites are found in the drinking supplies of "24 major metropolitan areas affecting 41 million Americans."

The Association has the right idea; we are all responsible -- vendors and consumers -- for keeping the soil and water clean. An even better idea is researching for funding sources outside of government funding, partly because the funding just does not exist in this economy, and partly because calling upon vendors to close the loop at the end of a product's life is only a responsible solution to a problem they are in part contributing to via a lack of education to consumers who are unaware of the dangers of medicines in soil and water supplies. **Product Policy Institute's** Executive Director, Dr. Bill Sheehan offered the following statement, "The cost of this program in 2008 was a mere \$315,000, which was shared by pharmaceutical companies."

Anyone familiar with life cycle analyses looks to empower the manufacturers and users of a product, from harvesting the raw materials through the multiple assembly partners and on to the end user, to take responsibility for the harm that product may cause to the environment. Mandating that more companies take part in the full life cycle of a product, particularly polluting products like medicines, is the next step in the green movement. "Like Europe and Canada, the U.S. can develop programs to cover the costs of collecting, transporting and disposing of these medicines. It's imperative we do so." Well said Sheehan.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/mnCorporateResponsibility/idUS144605184120090730>