

Pharmaceuticals in Water



Background

Traces of pharmaceuticals are being detected in the environment, primarily in water (surface water, groundwater, and drinking water) and soil.

One of the ways pharmaceuticals get into our environment is by consumers throwing medications (prescription drugs and non-prescription/over-the-counter drugs) and other personal care products in the garbage, or flushing them down the toilet or the sink.

The potential human health risks associated with minute levels of pharmaceuticals in water in general and drinking water in particular is small; however, taking preventative action by disposing of pharmaceuticals safely helps protect our drinking water sources over the long term.



CleanWater
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How do pharmaceuticals get into the water supply?

One of the ways pharmaceuticals get into the water supply is through improper disposal. In some cases, unused and unwanted medications are flushed down the sink or toilet. While water treatment is effective, minute quantities of pharmaceuticals end up in either lakes and rivers, or they end up being part of the biosolids that typically are disposed of through land application.

Pharmaceuticals disposed of in a landfill can also end up in our water. The landfill liner can leak, and leachate, a liquid which contains harmful substances, can contaminate the local ground water.

Why take back unwanted medications to your local pharmacy?

To encourage proper disposal, the Ontario Clean Water Agency and the Clean Water Foundation are asking people to take back unwanted medications to their local pharmacy, where they are collected and disposed of safely. For more information, go to www.ocwa.com/pharma.

There are many reasons to take back expired or unwanted medications to your local pharmacy—accidental poisoning by children and an increasing problem with prescription drug abuse. Unused or expired medications in medicine cabinets increase the supply of dangerous drugs that are a leading cause of child and teen overdose.

Proper disposal of pharmaceuticals protects families and the environment. Small, but measurable levels of different drugs, are being detected in both our surface and ground waters. While these are trace amounts, they may still have an impact on aquatic ecosystems and the species that call those ecosystems home. Keeping these products out of landfills and water helps to keep our lakes and rivers contaminant free.

Unused and unwanted pharmaceuticals that are taken for disposal at your local pharmacy are collected and sent to waste energy facilities.