

THE NEXT STEP Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Discarding Your Pharms

As we've discussed previously, it's important to not put your leftover and outdated pharmaceuticals into the trash or drain. That's because these potent materials go from our landfills, sewers, and septic systems into our ecosystems. From there, they can pollute our water and cause life-threatening genetic defects and behavioral changes in animals. (You can find our article about the issues and remedies via the *STEP Online Index* at www.healthyworld.org/STEPIndex.html, under Pharmaceutical contamination.)

I've recently learned another key reason to avoid placing these medicines in the trash: the risks of accidental consumption, intentional misuse, and illegal distribution. For instance, curious young children and pets can be attracted to the colorful pills and packaging and consume them — causing a rushed emergency room visit and potential health harm. The drugs can also be discovered by anyone who's in your home or can access your trash cans. This includes teens, who are now regularly using and sharing found meds.

Unfortunately, folks can see these discarded pills as legal and thus a safe way to get high, reduce stress, dull pain, get focus, etc. They don't realize that these strong substances require a prescription so that a doctor can evaluate an individual's health status, weigh conflicts and side effects, control dosage, and monitor

impacts. Without this process, the risks greatly increase for serious health impacts, death, and addiction. (See box for more on this. I'm amazed at how serious this has become!)

Proper disposal

So then how do you discard pharms safely? You can drop medicines *that aren't controlled substances* at the Household Toxics Facility or a Community Collections Day. Added drop-off spots have been setup through the Safe Medicine Disposal Program. (Sebastopol has one at the police station, 6850 Laguna Park Way, 707/829-4400.)



At all these sites, you can drop both prescription and over-the-counter pills, capsules, ointments, lotions, and creams. You can also discard medical patches, inhalers, vitamins, and pet medicines. This service is offered free to residents. The items go into a secure bin that's shipped for incineration.

These sites won't take some things, including IV and chemotherapy bags. Learn more about what to discard and how to prepare medicines for drop-off at www.recyclenow.org/toxics/medications.asp. Also, read about sharps disposal at www.recyclenow.org/toxics/syringes.asp.

Controlled substances

OK, so then how do you discard leftover controlled substances, such as morphine, oxycodone (Percodan®), codeine, Ritalin®, Valium®, and Xanax®? Distribution of these drugs

See **Pharms**, over

Prescription Drug Abuse

■ **"Non-medical" prescription use** is use by someone without a prescription or in ways inconsistent with medical instructions (e.g., very high doses, snorting, injecting).

■ In 2011, **52 million people in the U.S. age 12 and older used prescription drugs non-medically** at least once in their lifetime. (That's 20%, or 1 in 5 folks!) Also, **6.2 million people said they are current users** (in the prior month). (*The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*)

■ A 2013 nationally-representative survey showed that **24% of high school students (more than 5 million U.S. children) have abused prescription drugs**. That's an increase of 33% from 2008. (*The Partnership at Drugfree.org*)

■ In 2007-2008, **70% of people age 12 years and older who abused pain relievers said they got them from a friend or relative**. This includes substances given, taken, and bought. (*Survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*)

■ **Teens' reasons for non-medical pharm use include:** easy to get from parents' medicine chests or other people's prescriptions; (perceived) safer than street drugs; cheap; and less shame or parental concern if discovered. They (and their parents) can be unaware of the real health risks. (*Survey by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America*)

■ In 2011, **over 1.2 million emergency room visits** involved non-medical use of prescription medication. (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*)

■ In 2013, **nearly 2 million people in the U.S.** lived with prescription opioid abuse or dependence, almost four times the number living with heroin addiction. (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*)

■ In 2012, **pharmaceutical drug overdoses emerged as a leading cause of death in the U.S.** Its 38,329 deaths were more than car crashes (35,498) and firearms (31,672). (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*)

Safely Tossing Out Body Care Products

After reading our article “Detoxing Your Body Care Routine,” a reader asked me how to properly dispose of body care products that no longer met her more informed standards. (You can find this article via the *STEP Online Index*, under Body Care Products.) I appreciated the topic idea, and saw that other folks might want to dispose of leftover body care products for a variety of reasons, including just clearing non-current items from the cupboards.

So, here are my suggested steps for discarding a body care product:

1) Is the product unopened? If so, and you have a recent receipt, consider returning it to the store where you bought it. Or donate it to a women’s shelter.

2) Does the product need to be dropped at the Toxics Facility or a Collections Day? Most body care products don’t, but a few require that special handling. These include nail polish and its remover, and medical products (including ointments and shampoos).

3) Does the product contain microbeads? We don’t want these released in the environment. Look for “microbeads” in the product description, or “polyethylene” or “polypropylene” in the ingredients. You can drop a microbead product at the Toxics Facility or a Collec-

tions Day. Or tighten the lid and put it in the trash. Skip buying these in the future. (For more, see the *STEP Online Index* under Microbeads.)

4) Are there special disposal directions on the product’s packaging or usage instructions? If so, follow them!

5) Are there any other ingredients of concern? Some body care ingredients aren’t considered toxic waste but are more toxic than you might want to use on your body. (For more on this, see the *STEP Online Index* under Body Care Products.)

If you want to be more thorough in discarding your product, you can see where it falls in that toxicity spectrum. To do that:

- **Look at the ingredients, to see if you can recognize and pronounce them all.** This is a rough method to help identify the more natural products that are unlikely to be of toxic concern. (This approach is less effective if you’re a chemist!)

- **Look up your product in EWG’s Skin Deep® Cosmetics Database** (www.ewg.org/skindeep). This website covers more than makeup products, has a handy ranking system, and explains its assessments.

6) How do you want to discard your product?

- **If you don’t consider the item overly toxic, you could:** use it up, give it to someone else, stow it in your gym bag, or put it in your car for emergencies.

Pharms, continued

is more tightly restricted, because of their higher potential for harm, abuse, and dependency. It’s even more important to store these away from children’s access, and not give them to others. (For more, see www.awarerx.org/get-informed/prescription-information/controlled-substances.)

To address the need for controlled substance disposal, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has been doing annual National Prescription Drug Take-Back events. The next one will be on September 26, from 10am to 2pm. (As we go to

press, the locations haven’t yet been posted. To find a site near you, see www.dea.gov or call 800/882-9539.) Folks are also working to develop local drop-off points for ongoing controlled substance takeback.

I’d also note that you can reduce your drug disposal activities by only getting the minimum medicine amounts you need at the start.

SOURCES: “Prescription Drug Abuse Up Among Teens: Survey,” By Alan Mozes, www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20130423/prescription-drug-abuse-up-among-us-teens-survey • www.claad.org/rx-drug-abuse-stats • www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/popping-pills-prescription-drug-abuse-in-america

Local Toxics Disposal

■ **The next Sebastopol Toxics Collections Day is Tuesday December 8**, from 4 to 8pm. To make an appointment, call 707/795-2025 or 877/747-1870 at least 24 hours before the event. You can also drop items at the Household Toxics Facility.

■ **For more about local toxics disposal**, see www.recyclenow.org or call 707/565-3375.

- **If it’s not toxic and not concentrated, you might:** pour it down the sink, then rinse and recycle the bottle in your blue can. (If you have a septic or graywater system, check first that it’s OK to put that material down your drain.)

- **If you’re concerned about the toxicity level, or just want to be cautious**, you can choose to drop it off at the Toxics Facility or a Collections Day.

- **Or you can tighten the top and put it in your trash.**

7) Remember this issue when you’re buying new products. We often don’t consider disposal at purchase time. But any toxics in a product will need to be addressed at discard time — for you, our communities, and our environment. If you must buy a toxic, buy only what you need to avoid leftovers. And the smartest and easiest choice is for us not to use toxics in the first place.

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. **STEP is a project of the City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP’s mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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