Safe Medicine Disposal for ME Program

Based on figures from the National Unused and Expired Medicine Registry, as many as 40% of prescription medicines are never used. Such medicines represent an expensive waste of healthcare resources and a potential environmental and safety hazard.

Unused Prescription Medicine is:

An Environmental and Health Hazard
- Over half of Americans dispose of unwanted prescription medicine in the trash, one-third put it down the sink or toilet, and only 1.4% return it to a collection facility.\(^1\)
- Prescription medicine then enters the water through disposal down a drain or from the leaching or leaking of the drugs from landfills.\(^2\)
- Over 80 pharmaceuticals of various prescription drug classes have been found in treated sewage, surface water, and ground water throughout the country.\(^3\)
- Studies have found that exposure to medicine in water has been linked to serious reproductive side effects in fish, and the full effect on humans is currently unknown.\(^4\)

A Danger to Children and Pets
- Children and pets can accidentally get poisoned by unused prescription medicine found in the home.
- In the US, medicine in the home accounts for more accidental poisonings than any other product.\(^5\)
- Nearly 2% of children ages 12-13 intentionally misuse prescription medicine.\(^6\)
  Accessibility to the medicine is likely a contributing factor to this growing trend.\(^7\)

A Danger to Older Adults
- Older adults make up only 13% of the population, but fill one-third of all prescriptions. This makes them susceptible to intentional or accidental medicine misuse, dependence, and addiction.\(^8\)
- Diversion and theft of prescription medicine is currently at very high levels, and older adults may be particularly at risk.\(^9\)

A Danger to Communities
- In 2002 in Maine, almost 90% of all drug deaths were caused by prescription medicine.\(^10\)
- The non-medical use of prescription medicine, among US residents ages 12 and older, is more common than the use of any illicit drug except marijuana.\(^11\)
- Maine DEA arrests for prescription medicine misuse have increased dramatically to 16% of all arrests.\(^12\)

A Waste of Valuable Healthcare Dollars
- One small study conservatively estimates the cost of wasted prescription medicine by adults ages 65 and older to be over one billion dollars annually.\(^13\)
- With healthcare costs rising at 3 times the rate of inflation, this waste will only continue to grow.\(^14\)

For more information contact Safe Medicine Disposal for ME
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References:


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