



# DEC Tells New Yorkers: Don't Flush Medications

## New Educational Campaign and Website Launched to Help Protect Water Quality

A new initiative to help reduce the growing presence of pharmaceuticals in water bodies is being launched today by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Commissioner Pete Grannis announced. The "Don't Flush Your Drugs" campaign and website, [www.dontflushyourdrugs.net](http://www.dontflushyourdrugs.net), will help raise public awareness and provide information about how to dispose of medicines properly to help prevent problems with water quality in the future.

Recent reports have shown that an array of medicines are showing up in our rivers and streams as well as in the drinking water supplies of a number of American cities. Though no New York community was singled out, these news reports indicate that pharmaceuticals -- including antibiotics -- can be found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans. The concentrations of the pharmaceuticals are small - far below typical medical doses - but studies have found problematic impacts on wildlife and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has acknowledged that the issue is a serious concern.

"It is critical that all New Yorkers do their part to protect the

state's water resources," Governor David A. Paterson said. "While recognizing that the presence of pharmaceuticals in the water is a multi-faceted issue with no single solution or easy technological fix, all of us need to take precautionary action on the things we can affect immediately."

"This is an emerging environmental issue and the consequences are not yet clear," Commissioner Grannis said. "New Yorkers can help out by not flushing unused drugs and instead using alternate disposal methods. We recognize that we're now asking residents to change something that has been standard practice for years, but we know everyone wants to protect New York's water quality and public health."

"New York's public drinking water is of high quality, but keeping unused drugs out of our waters helps to maintain or improve that quality," said New York State Department of Health (DOH) Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. "Hospitals and other institutions can also help with these efforts."

"The State Education Department recognizes this emerging environmental problem and is working with the DEC to address

For Release: IMMEDIATE  
Contact: Maureen Wren  
Friday, August 8, 2008  
(518) 402-8000

the proper disposal of drugs." New York State Education Commissioner Richard Mills said. "The Education Department, with the advice of its Board of Pharmacy and the pharmaceutical community that it regulates, will continue to study why so many dispensed drugs go unused and to determine appropriate strategies to insure that New Yorkers and their environment are protected."

At least 24 major metropolitan areas in the U.S. have been identified by new reports as having pharmaceuticals in drinking water supplies. Philadelphia officials found 56 pharmaceuticals or byproducts in the city's treated drinking water. Anti-epileptic and anti-anxiety medications were detected in a Southern California drinking water supply. Three medications, including an antibiotic, were found in the water supplied to Tucson, Ariz.

Scientists say pharmaceuticals get into water by a variety of ways: individuals and institutions flush unused drugs, unabsorbed drugs pass through the human body, pharmaceuticals may not be completely decomposed in septic tanks, and drug manufacturers discharge pharmaceutical wastes. Wastewater treatment plants are not specifically designed to eliminate these types of chemicals, so treatment of municipal and industrial discharge is not the entire answer. Drinking water

treatment plants also don't necessarily remove all drug residues.

Under the new campaign, DEC will take pro-active steps to address the issue. These include educating the public about the potential hazards of pharmaceuticals in the water and about the proper disposal of unused drugs. This will include consumer guidance on DEC's web site and education materials in pharmacies.

Instead of flushing medicines, New Yorkers should place their unused, unwanted or expired drugs in the trash, taking care to destroy or disguise them to avoid misuse or misdirection. Adding water, salt, ashes or coffee grounds to unused medications before placing them in the trash can further guard against misuse. Detailed instructions and suggestions are available on the new DEC website [www.dontflushy-ourdrugs.net](http://www.dontflushy-ourdrugs.net) .

Other key aspects of the campaign:

- Governor Paterson has designated DEC to lead an interagency task force involving the state Departments of Health and Education to develop new guidance for pharmaceutical disposal practices at hospitals and other institutions. This task force will work with the institutions to ensure the guidance is workable and to spread the word about newly prescribed disposal methods.
- DEC and DOH will combine research efforts with EPA, the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) and other agencies. DEC, DOH and USGS have been working together since 2003 on monitoring contaminants (including phar-

maceuticals) in the New York City watershed.

- DEC will encourage pilot collection programs for pharmaceuticals, either by pharmacies or local governments. To date, two counties and two drug stores in the state have held special pharmaceutical collection events. DEC will seek federal funding to create additional pilot programs and determine the feasibility of a statewide collection program.
- New York will urge the EPA to update and revise regulations for disposing pharmaceuticals and update water standards. Most states, including New York, do not have the resources to do this on their own and most of EPA's water quality criteria date back to the early 1980s.