

# Impact of Pharmaceutical Waste on the Environment

## Safe and Sustainable Disposal Methods

Stericycle provides pharmaceutical waste management programs to healthcare providers for the **safe and environmentally-friendly** disposal of drugs.

**55% of Americans** surveyed unknowingly dispose of unused prescription medication improperly.<sup>1</sup>

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations for health care organizations banning the flushing/sewering of hazardous waste pharmaceuticals are designed to reduce the amount of hazardous waste pharmaceuticals entering our waterways by up to **2,300 tons** annually.<sup>2</sup>

Since pharmaceutical components are not effectively removed from typical waste treatment systems, **flushing allows dangerous chemicals to enter waterways.**

Studies have shown that fish, at various life stages, exposed to complex combinations of drugs in their environment have suffered various adverse effects such as **reduced growth and weakening of defense systems, as well as organ and hormonal changes.**<sup>3</sup>

Researchers have identified traces of pharmaceuticals in the drinking water supplies of some **40 million Americans.**<sup>4</sup>

The Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) 2020 National Take Back Day in October retrieved **985,392 lbs** of unused medications.<sup>5</sup> Stericycle's Med-Drop™ **medication collection kiosks**, located at thousands of hospitals, pharmacies, and law enforcement facilities across the country, collected over **1.5 million lbs** of unused medications in 2020.

The DEA allows consumer medications to be sent for destruction via mailback through a DEA-registered provider. Stericycle has distributed over one million Seal&Send™ medication mailers that hold up to 8oz. each and are prepaid for **easy and anonymous disposal.**

In 2020, **40 million pounds** of drugs were safely disposed through Stericycle's pharmaceutical waste solutions.<sup>6</sup>

### Sources:

1. Patient Safety Survey, Stericycle data, 2019.
2. United States Environmental Protection Agency, Hazardous Waste Generators, <https://www.epa.gov/hwgenerators/final-rule-management-standards-hazardous-waste-pharmaceuticals-and-amendment-p075>, accessed 4/4/2019.
3. Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry, <https://setac.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1897/08-556.1>, accessed 4/4/2019.
4. CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/probe-pharmaceuticals-in-drinking-water/>, accessed 4/4/2019.
5. [https://takebackday.dea.gov/sites/default/files/NTBI%2019%20Totals\\_0.pdf](https://takebackday.dea.gov/sites/default/files/NTBI%2019%20Totals_0.pdf).
6. Stericycle annual data, 2020.

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