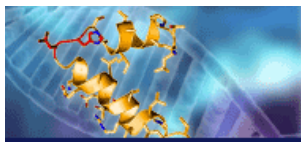


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The Nutshell

Just Throw Them Out

Researchers determine that the best way to get rid of unused pharmaceuticals with the least amount of environmental impact is to drop them in the garbage.

By Edyta Zielinska | May 17, 2012

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Consumers throw away an estimated 200 million pounds of unused pharmaceuticals every year, but what's the best way to dispose of these leftovers? Despite claims that trashed drugs can leach into the [local waterways](#), where they may affect both environmental and human health, a [study published](#) last month (April 11) from researchers at the University of Michigan found that the best and most cost effective way to reduce impact was, in fact, to throw unused pills in the garbage.

The researchers compared three possible disposal methods: flushing the drugs, returning them to a pharmacy for incineration, or throwing them away. While incineration rendered the drugs completely inactive, the annual cost of a national drug take-back program could be as high as \$2 billion. Flushing the drugs down the toilet would result in the highest environmental exposure to the chemicals. On the other hand, prior research had suggested that leaching from a landfill was not a significant source of pollution. Therefore, trash disposal is the simplest and most economical strategy.

"Trash disposal is likely to accomplish faster removal of unused pharmaceuticals from households due to higher participation rates and greater convenience," the authors wrote in their paper, published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

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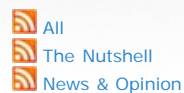
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