



## NEWS BRIEFS

# Groups Urge FDA To End Medication Flushing Advice

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Drinking water and wastewater utility groups, along with environmentalists and state drinking water program officials, are urging the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to end its recommendations that certain leftover household medications be flushed, and instead to show support for take-back programs for disposal.

The call attempts to halt inconsistencies between the FDA and other federal and state agencies on the flushing or trash disposal of leftover medications.

The groups ask in a [Jan. 26 letter](#) to FDA Acting Commissioner Stephen Ostroff that FDA work with EPA, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to create “clear and consistent guidance to consumers on safe disposal of leftover household medications.” They say FDA should halt its recommendation to dispose by flushing certain leftover medications, and to clarify that secure take-back programs for medications offer the best disposal method for these medications.

Dozens of national and regional groups signed the letter. Among them are drinking water utility groups American Water Works Association and Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, the wastewater treatment utility group National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the state group Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, the environmental group Clean Water Action, the California Product Stewardship Council and others.

The organizations say it is time for FDA “to align its medicine disposal guidance with that of federal, state and local agencies who seek to protect both the public’s health and our water quality.”

The push comes as EPA is proposing a plan to impose [a sewer ban](#) on all hazardous waste pharmaceuticals managed by healthcare facilities and pharmaceutical reverse distributors. The plan is part of a proposed hazardous waste pharmaceuticals rule EPA released last year, and took comment on through Dec. 24. A host of commenters on the plan [generally endorsed](#) the proposed sewer ban in the rule.

In addition, DEA in 2014 finalized a rule to expand the locations that can collect unwanted pharmaceuticals as part of an effort to lower the amount of controlled substances entering waterbodies, and included a requirement that collected controlled substances be destroyed in a way that makes them “non-retrievable.” DEA does not specify a type of destruction method in the rule although it says in the preamble that sewerage and landfill disposal do not meet the standard.

In addition, as wastewater treatment plants cannot effectively remove pharmaceuticals during treatment, some wastewater agencies have approved laws and regulations prohibiting flushing as a disposal method for pharmaceuticals, the groups say in the letter. “In these areas, FDA’s recommendations infringe on wastewater districts’ jurisdictional authority to protect public health,” they say.

They point out that many communities have medicine collection programs, and DEA’s rule allows for new take-back options.

Therefore, FDA should “end its ‘flush list’ recommendation,” and work with other agencies on a single disposal guidance, the groups say.

They advise FDA adopt four “clear messages” on safe disposal: to safeguard water quality, never flush unwanted medicine; use community medicine take-back programs; take leftover medicines to DEA’s bi-annual prescription drug take-back days; as a last resort, if no take-back options are available in a community, place medicines in a sealed

container in the trash after mixing with an undesirable substance such as coffee grounds, they say.

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