

What's in Your Medicine Cabinet?

Have you looked in your medicine cabinet lately? You might find unused prescription medicines, expired over-the-counter products like aspirin, cold remedies, vitamins and supplements, even pet medications. Do you think that flushing them down the toilet or the sink is the best way to get rid of them? STOP!

You may have been told, even by a by a healthcare provider, that this is the preferred way to dispose of unwanted medications. Flushing unwanted drugs down the toilet or sink does prevent someone from accidentally or intentionally taking the medicine. But, disposing of them in this way causes water pollution because they pass through septic systems and sewage treatment plants untreated.



Drugs in the water, even in highly diluted concentrations, can have adverse effects on fish and other aquatic wildlife. For example, estrogen and estrogen-mimicking compounds have been shown to cause a "feminization" of some kinds of fish. There may be human affects as well — the release of antibiotics in the environment may account for an increased resistance of certain bacteria to these antibiotics.

Health care facilities and businesses are regulated and have systems in place to safely dispose of pharmaceuticals and hazardous wastes. But individuals have fewer options since consumer generated pharmaceutical waste is not considered household hazardous waste (HHW) and cannot be brought to a HHW collection (primarily because controlled substances require special handling). However, we can do our part to prevent environmental damage by disposing of these products in the best way possible — by safely putting them in the trash. In Connecticut, most of our garbage is burned at Resource Recovery Facilities at very high temperatures that will destroy these products and prevent them from getting into our land and water.

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The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recommends that you carefully follow these steps before you put any medicines in the trash:

1. Keep the medication in its original container.

- To protect privacy and discourage misuse of the prescription, cross out the patient's name with a permanent marker or duct tape the label.

2. Modify the medications to discourage consumption.

- For solid medications, such as pills or capsules: add a small amount of water to at least partially dissolve them.
- For liquid medications: add enough table salt, flour, charcoal, or nontoxic powdered spice, such as turmeric or mustard to make a pungent, unsightly mixture that discourages anyone from eating it.
- For blister packs: wrap the blister packages containing pills in multiple layers of duct or other opaque tape.

3. Seal and conceal.

- Tape the medication container lid shut with packing or duct tape.
- Place it inside a non-transparent bag or container such as an empty yogurt or margarine tub to ensure that the contents cannot be seen.
- Do not conceal medicines in food products because animals could inadvertently consume them.

4. *Discard the container in your garbage can.*

Do not place in your recycling bin!

Of course, there are times when we need to take prescriptions or over the counter drugs, but we can also try to minimize the need for disposal. Here are some pollution prevention practices to consider:

- If possible, ask your doctor to give you a smaller amount of a prescription or a sample of a drug that you are taking for the first time to see if it works for you. This may save you money and will also eliminate the need for throwing the drug away if it doesn't work for you. Do the same for animal prescriptions.
- Look at the expiration date on over-the-counter products. Will you be able to use all of it before the product expires? If not, maybe a smaller amount will do.
- Look into mail-back programs for sharps: See the *Sustainable Hospitals* website for a list of companies that provide containers at http://www.sustainablehospitals.org/cgi-bin/DB_Index.cgi (Sharps Containers - Mail Back Programs) or check with your local hospital. Note: DEP does not endorse any products. Contact vendors directly to purchase a product or to obtain more information.

To find out how to dispose of other medicines and medical supplies, go to <http://www.ct.gov/dep/p2> under the Individuals/Family section and look for the table in Disposing of Prescription Medicines and Over-the-Counter (OTC) Products.

WHAT'S NEW IN P2?

from the Connecticut DEP

Organic Land Care Pilot Program



OLC Professional conducts site assessment with Manchester

Following the distribution of its Organic Land Care DVD, DEP solicited applications from municipalities interested in participating in a pilot project to demonstrate organic practices on a school or municipal recreation field. The selection process included a point rating system for the application's questions followed up by on-site interviews with the three top-rated municipalities. Over 30 municipalities throughout the state applied to participate.

The Town of Manchester was selected due to its application's many strong points — the pilot field is located within a potential high-yield aquifer area and the town produces compost that may be used to top dress the field. The project will provide technical assistance to their town crew in transitioning from conventional turf management, including soil tests, site analysis and on-site training in organic methods from an accredited organic land care professional (see www.organiclandcare.net). Throughout the project, costs will be documented and outcomes measured. We are hopeful that this project will help us figure out ways to make organic land care more affordable for municipalities.

For more information or if you want your e-mail address to be included in an electronic mailing list that we have created especially for this project, please contact Judy Prill, DEP Office of Pollution Prevention at (860) 424-3694 or e-mailto: judith.prill@po.state.ct.us. This will enable us to let you know about training opportunities and at the earliest opportunity we will share the results of the pilot project with you.

Purchasing Cooperative for Organic Fertilizers

Connecticut municipalities and non-profits can now take advantage of the Capitol Region Purchasing Council's (CRPC) Grass Seed and Fertilizer Bid to purchase organic fertilizers. Several towns interested in organic land care requested that these fertilizers be added to the bid. CRPC used OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) standards to standardize the specification for the fertilizers, which include Sustane 5-2-4 Fine Grade, 10-2-10 Fine Grade with Nutralene, 2-3-3 Organic and 4-6-4 Turf Grade Organic.

The CRPC is a voluntary purchasing cooperative serving 66 communities, government agencies, and

non-profits within the Capitol Region and beyond. Operating under the auspices of the Capitol Region Council of Governments, the CRPC functions as both a supplemental procurement office for its member municipalities and as a central clearinghouse for the collection and distribution of purchasing-related information and expertise. Membership is open to any government entity or non-profit. For more information, contact Jennifer March-Wackers at jwackers@crcog.org, (860) 522-2217 or visit <http://www.crcog.org/purchasing%20coun/archivebids.html> - scroll down to the Grass Seed and Fertilizer Bid documents.



Smart Energy Game

DEP's Pollution Prevention Office debuted its new Smart Energy Game at the Wesleyan Environmental Awareness Conference workshops in mid-March. The Game, based on an exhibit at the Smart Living Center in Orange, helps students and adults understand the benefits of going with Energy Star appliances. The colorful backdrop explains how to play as well as pointing out the dollars saved and carbon dioxide emissions reduced with the 7 Energy Star appliances in the game—refrigerators, TVs, computers, dishwashers, lights, dehumidifiers and room air conditioners.

Teams of fifth-graders at the conference put game pieces representing standard efficiency appliances in one tube and then put the

Energy Star equivalent of the same appliances in a second tube. Kilowatt-hours are marked on the tube so the students took the two annual kWh totals and calculated the savings for their families if they were to switch out the 7 appliances.

Students played a second game, "Pay Me" focused on simple energy conservation measures, like turning off appliances. When asked what they would pledge to do to "Be smart about energy", 15 of the 23 checked off "Talk to my parents about Energy Star appliances." All pledged to turn off or reduce using something—a light, the TV, the refrigerator. And ten pledged to change an incandescent bulb to an energy-saving compact fluorescent light!

DEP received assistance from the staff of the United Illuminating Company's Smart Living Center and funding from the federal EPA to produce the game. If you are interested in borrowing the Smart Energy Game, contact Mary Sherwin at (860) 424-3246 or mary.sherwin@po.state.ct.us

Naming and Taming The Toxics

Almost every day we hear about some new study that has concluded “something” is good or bad for our health and/or the environment. It’s all very confusing. Where can you get reliable information without spending hours on the Internet or trying to find the right person to call? DEP staff found out about one resource right in our own backyard — at the CT Department of Public Health (DPH).



DPH’s toxicologist Gary Ginsberg and epidemiologist Brian Toal presented “Is it Toxic Or Not?” at the March DEP Pollution Prevention Lecture. Ginsberg and Toal informed the audience employees about toxic chemical ingredients commonly found in the home, school and workplace, in the foods we consume and in the air we breathe indoors and outside and how these ingredients can affect your health and impact the environment.

Ginsberg explained that toxic ingredients are not just in cleaners and home maintenance products—they’re in all kinds of consumer products, including make-up and personal care products and even in some toys. He also warned that we cannot assume that just because a product is on the store shelf, that it has been tested “safe” by some state or federal agency.

Although the message can sometimes seem to be all “gloom and doom,” they were quick to point out that exposure to many toxic chemicals can be lessened or avoided completely. For example, we can eliminate the use of ammonia and bleach, (skin and lung irritants, asthma triggers) in our homes by using non-toxic cleaning products. These cleaning products are becoming easier to find, even in regular supermarkets. (If you are so inclined, you can even make your own—see below.) We can avoid exposure to phthalates, a chemical implicated in impaired male fetal development, by never storing or microwaving food in #3 code (PVC plastic) containers, by not purchasing soft vinyl toys, and avoiding bath and body products containing phthalates, especially during pregnancy.

By staying informed, you can make better choices for your health and the environment. You can begin by checking these resources:

- Dept. of Public Health, <http://www.dph.state.ct.us/>
- Take the home toxics test at <http://www.whatstoxic.com>
- What’s Toxic, What’s Not, by Dr. Gary Ginsberg and Brian Toal, MSPH, Available at bookstores.
- Pollution Prevention tips, including recipes for cleaning products: <http://www.ct.gov/dep/p2>
- Environmental Working Group, <http://www.ewg.org/reports/beautysecrets/chap3.html>, Information on toxics in cosmetics. You can also check out ingredients in common personal care products: <http://www.ewg.org/issues/cosmetics/virtualdrugstore.php>

Recycling Rundup

Keeping the Mercury from Rising



Mercury has become a household word. We turn on the evening news and hear reports of spills at schools, loading docks and, most recently, a couple of hundred pounds were discovered on a Connecticut local road.

Statewide, there has been a tremendous effort over the past five years to educate residents about the dangers of mercury, and laws have been put in place to ban the sale of many products that contain mercury. Mercury thermostats, blood pressure cuffs and fever thermometers are among those products that are no longer available in Connecticut, since non-mercury alternatives exist.

While most people know that thermometers and thermostats have mercury, many may not realize that compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) also contain a small amount too, about 5 mg, and need to be disposed of properly. However, since CFLs are much more energy efficient than regular (incandescent) bulbs, and last almost 10 times longer, using them actually reduces mercury emissions. This is so because burning fossil fuels to produce electricity releases mercury into the environment, and incandescent bulbs use more electricity.

When CFLs burn out they should be recycled at a household hazardous waste (HHW) collection and not just thrown in the trash. Most towns hold HHW collections each year between April and October. To find out when your town will have a collection visit http://www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2718&q=325448&depNav_GID=1646.

Remember to dispose of all of your HHW, including chemicals, pesticides, toxic cleaning products, and any other items, at a HHW collection.

Waste Matters — You Can Help Find Solutions

By now, most *P2 View* readers know that DEP has a new plan in place to manage the state's trash through the year 2024. However, what you may not know is that you can play a big role in helping accomplish the goals set out in the *State's Solid Waste Management Plan* by being part of a new Advisory Committee. We all create garbage — so we all need find ways to reduce, reuse and recycle everything we can.

DEP needs your creative ideas to meet some very challenging goals that have been set, like doubling the current rate of recycling, dealing with issues such as electronic wastes, getting the toxics out, reducing the amount of packaging, and organics recycling (composting), to name a few.

So, come join the new Advisory Committee that is being formed; membership is open to anyone that is interested. The first meeting of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee was held in March, but it is not too late to participate. Meetings will held each month on the fourth Tuesday. For more information on getting involved visit the website at www.ct.gov/dep/swmp or contact Tessa Gutowski at (860) 424-3096.



Note: This feature offers answers to select environmental questions. Send your question to the editor's address -- judith.prill@po.state.ct.us and watch future issues for an answer.

Dear Eartha:

I heard that the clothes dryer is one of the biggest energy users in a home. Do you have any tips on how to reduce my energy use and electric bill? I have a family of four and I do a load of wash almost every day and my dryer is over 10 years old. Thanks!

— Janice D.,
Waterbury, CT

You're right. An electric dryer is the second biggest energy hog in the house after the refrigerator. Connecticut Light and Power (CL & P) estimates that a typical electric dryer, operating 24 hours a month, will cost \$18-20/month! There are some ways you can use your dryer more efficiently.

- Don't overload the dryer. Items will dry better if they have room to tumble. A good rule of thumb is one washer load = one dryer load.
- Don't over-dry. Taking clothes out slightly damp will eliminate wrinkles and the need for ironing.
- Dry items of similar weight together – i.e., do towels, jeans, heavy flannel shirts in one load and lighter things, like sheets, shirts in another. Keep in mind that synthetics dry more quickly than cotton.



The ultimate energy-saving clothes dryer

- Piggy back loads to take advantage of the heat of the previous load or use the permanent press cycle to allow items to dry using the residual heat in the dryer
- Consider eliminating those dryer sheets. The dryer sheets can build up a coating on the dryer's lint screen and moisture sensor, making the dryer less efficient. If you can't give up the dryer sheets, at least clean the lint screen and the moisture sensor occasionally.
- Clean the lint filter after every load!
- Make sure the outside dryer exhaust is not blocked.

If you are in the market for a new dryer: New dryers are better insulated and are more efficient. Consider buying one with a moisture sensor. A moisture sensor will turn off the machine when the clothes are dry. If you have the gas hook-up, you might consider

buying a gas dryer; it will cost about half as much to operate as an electric one. By the way, you won't find any energy star-rated dryers because all dryers work about the same.

Of course, the way you can save 100% over what you are spending on drying time is to not use the dryer at all.

- Hang your clothes outside FOR FREE! If you have seasonal allergies, this may not be an option. If you don't like how your towels or jeans feel when they are line-dried, consider using the clothesline for sheets and other items.
- If line drying is out of the question, consider buying a clothes rack for inside.

— Eartha

For more laundry energy saving tips, go to

<http://www1.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips/laundry.html>



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P2 View is published by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Pollution Prevention. Editor: Judy Prill; Contributors: Nan Peckham, Mary Sherwin, Connie Mendolia, Kim Trella, Tess Gutowski, Tom Metzner

Publication of this newsletter is funded by a grant from the U.S. EPA. The listing of websites in this publication is provided as a public service and does not constitute an endorsement by DEP.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper using water-based ink. 

P 2 C A L E N D A R

A S E L E C T I O N O F E N V I R O N M E N T A L E V E N T S

May 19, 2007
Solar Tour and Seminar
 South Norwalk, CT

Tour of home with solar hot water, passive solar, 4.8 kw photovoltaic installation, sponsored by Peoples' Action for Clean Energy. For general information, call (860) 693-4813. For ticket information, call (860) 242-4205.

May 23, 2007
**Green Buildings:
 Raised Flooring Seminar**
 Windsor, CT

Learn about underfloor service distribution for power, voice, data, and HVAC and earn credits. Dale Fowler of Tate Access Floors will present this seminar at Northeast Utilities' facility with a large underfloor service distribution system onsite for demonstration. For more information, see Events listing at www.CTGBC.org

June 6, 2007
**Foodshare's LEED-Certified
 Distribution Center Tour**
 Bloomfield, CT

Donate food and learn about green design. CT Green Building Council board meeting at 3 PM; Tour/speaker at 4 PM - followed by a reception. For more information, see Events listing at www.CTGBC.org