

# **KEEPING NEW YORK'S WATERS DRUG-FREE**

**Promoting Safe  
Pharmaceutical  
Disposal from  
Montauk to Buffalo**

**CITIZENS  
CAMPAIGN**



**FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

# FLUSHING DRUGS: *A prevalent*

For decades, health professionals and the public were told to flush unwanted or expired medications, despite the fact that wastewater treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to remove these contaminants. While flushing drugs is no longer recommended, there are still many health care facilities and residents that continue to flush their drugs.

## Unused Medications

It is estimated that up to 43% of the almost four billion prescriptions dispensed in the U.S. every year go unused. Members of the public do not currently have sufficient access to consistent, secure, and convenient disposal options for all these unwanted medicines, despite growing recognition of the importance of safe drug disposal.

*Up to 43% of all prescriptions dispensed in the U.S. every year go unused.*

## Prescription Drug Abuse

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), nearly one-third of people age 12 and over who used drugs for the first time in 2009 began by using a prescription drug non-medically. Seven of ten people that abuse prescription drugs get them from a friend or family member.

The CDC has classified prescription drug abuse as an epidemic.

## Healthcare Facilities

Healthcare facilities such as nursing homes, hospice facilities, and long term care facilities, which house a high volume of prescription medications, often revert to flushing to dispose of unused or expired drugs. In 2013, Citizens Campaign for the Environment analyzed the existing drug policies at health care facilities in Suffolk County, NY and found that 51% were flushing their drugs. Many of these facilities indicated that the lack of safe disposal options or free pick-up days was the reason for their flushing policies.

*CCE found that 51% of the healthcare facilities in Suffolk were flushing unused controlled substances.*



# ent, yet preventable source of pollution



## Drugs in Our Waters

Trace amounts of pharmaceutical drugs are being detected in our rivers, streams, lakes, and estuaries throughout New York and the nation. National studies have found trace amounts of pharmaceutical drugs in drinking water supplies of 41 million Americans. A study conducted by the USGS found low levels of drugs such as antibiotics, hormones, contraceptives and steroids in 80% of the rivers and streams tested.

The effects of constant, low-level exposure of various pharmaceuticals on humans are uncertain, and more research is needed. While the health effects on humans have not yet been proven, a number of studies have shown impacts on aquatic life. For example, male fish have been feminized (produced eggs) when exposed to hormones (birth control pills). Other drugs, such as anti-depressants and beta-blockers, reduce fertility or affect spawning in certain aquatic organisms.



# THE SOLUTION IS CLEAR: D



***THE BEST OPTION: Incinerate unused meds through a safe drug disposal program.***

## Safely Dispose of Unused Medication

Improving options for safe, free, and convenient disposal helps to ***keep our waters drug-free.***

Safe disposal options help get unwanted drugs out of the cabinet and ***prevent prescription drug abuse.***

Throwing unused medications in the garbage is not a solution either. Even mixing medications with kitty litter or coffee grounds does not guarantee that the drugs will not be found and abused. In addition, medications that are landfilled can end up as leachate, end up contaminating land and water resources.

## NY State Programs to Keep Our Waters Drug-Free

Recognizing the threat that pharmaceutical pollution poses to our state's waters, New York State has launched programs to educate the public on safe disposal and increase access to safe disposal options. In 2010, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) began a program to provide safe disposal of unwanted pharmaceutical drugs from healthcare facilities.

***In the 2014-15 Budget, the Legislature provided \$650,000 for safe pharmaceutical disposal programs.*** These funds were used to expand the DEC program and also launch a Department of Health program to provide safe pharmaceutical disposal for residents and health care facilities. Both the DEC and DOH programs are working to stop unnecessary flushing and provide safe, free, and convenient disposal options for residents and health care facilities.



# DON'T FLUSH YOUR DRUGS

## 2015 Snapshot: Safe Drug Disposal

### Healthcare Facilities

DEC program expands to pick up unused meds from over 65 healthcare facilities.

### Pharmacies

Pharmaceutical drop boxes are installed in every King Kullen pharmacy on Long Island, collecting over one ton of drugs in one year.

### Police Precincts

Permanent drop boxes are installed at 10 police precincts and two ambulance companies.

### Municipalities

Over 30 municipal take-back events collect 650 pounds of drugs.

## Healthcare Facilities

While the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has offered safe pharmaceutical pickup at healthcare facilities two times per year, healthcare facilities often flush because stockpiles become too large between pickups.

To increase frequency of safe pharmaceutical disposal at healthcare facilities and complement the DEA program, the NYS DEC established a program in 2010 to collect unused medications from health care facilities in part of the New York City watershed, which was expanded to Monroe County in 2013.

In 2015, the state budget provided funding for DEC to expand the program to Nassau and Suffolk Counties. The DEC program has been a success, collecting unwanted drugs from upwards of 67 health care facilities throughout these three regions of the state.



While the DEC program has been successful in certain regions of the state, there is a need for this program statewide. Unfortunately, many health care facilities continue to flush unused medications.



### Ongoing program:

Protect Long Island's sole source aquifer from pharmaceutical contaminants. Visit the link below for a map of all drop-off locations.

<http://www.citizenscampaign.org/campaigns/pharmaceutical-disposal/nassau-suffolk-locations.asp>

# RESIDENTIAL PHARMACEUTICAL DISPOSAL

## Pharmacies

King Kullen has become a national leader in the fight to keep drugs out of our water, having installed pharmaceutical drop-boxes in all 11 of their supermarkets with pharmacies on Long Island. In the first year of the program, King Kullen collected one ton of unused medications in drop boxes purchased with support from NYS DOH.

While King Kullen has only collected non-controlled substances (e.g. antibiotics) due to restrictions in state law, they and other pharmacies are poised to begin collecting controlled substances (e.g. narcotics) due to a recent change in state law.

New York State legislation signed into law in October of 2015 allows for pharmacies to begin collecting controlled substances for the first time. Allowing pharmacies to take-back unwanted controlled substances is a game changer for safe pharmaceutical disposal, by vastly increasing public access to safe disposal options. While this is a huge step in the right direction, participation by pharmacies remains voluntary.

In **1 year** King Kullen collected over **1 ton, or 2,000 lbs,** of unused medication!

## Municipal Departments

Police Departments have been strong allies in working to expand safe disposal programs. For police departments, addressing the prescription drug abuse epidemic is not only a top priority for public health, it will also help build stronger communities and allow those with substance abuse disorders to lead healthier, more productive lives.

**12 new drop boxes** provide residents with safe disposal options.



## MODEL PROGRAM

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A grant from the NYS DOH has allowed Erie County to implement a county-wide program to prevent unsafe pharmaceutical disposal at 20 health care facilities. Single day collection events will be held at senior centers, assisted care facilities, and in rural municipal Town Halls to supplement the program. The program also contains an educational component on safe pharmaceutical disposal for staff and residents at these facilities.

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# MUNICIPAL DISPOSAL PROGRAMS

## Drop Boxes

In 2015, through a NYS DOH grant, 12 DEA approved drop boxes were installed in local police departments and ambulance companies. These boxes are 24/7 drop boxes where residents can drop off their medications (uncontrolled and controlled substances) for free, no questions asked.

Locations with 24/7 disposal options.

### Police Departments:

City Of Glen Cove  
 Village of Lynbrook  
 Village of Garden City  
 Village of Floral Park  
 Village of Lloyd Harbor  
 Onondaga County: 5 Boxes

### South Country Ambulance Co.

Bellport  
 East Patchogue

## Municipal Take-Back Days

In addition to permanent drop-boxes in pharmacies and police departments, municipalities around the state have organized take-back events, where residents can drop off their unused medications. (both non-controlled and controlled substances). Many of these events targeted seniors and were often held near senior living facilities and nursing homes to ensure convenient drop off for senior citizens. In 2015, events supported by New York collected 650 pounds of drugs!

**650 lbs** of drugs collected municipal take-back events!

<b>Suffolk County</b>	2 take-back days.	<b>81 lbs collected</b>
<b>Village of Hempstead</b>	2 take-back days, 16 events for senior citizens.	<b>125 lbs collected</b>
<b>Town of Huntington</b>	1 take-back day, 2 events for senior citizens.	<b>95 lbs collected</b>
<b>Town of North Hempstead</b>	5 events at senior centers, 1 health fair for 100+ seniors.	<b>270 lbs collected</b>
<b>Town of Mamaroneck</b>	2 take-back days, 1 event at Senior Center.	<b>75 lbs collected</b>



While great progress has been made to provide safe and convenient pharmaceutical disposal options to residents, there is still much more that needs to be done. With the model programs and pilot projects set up in Erie, Onondaga, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties collecting thousands of pounds of unused medications, there is a clear need for more disposal options located throughout New York State and for policies on the local, state, and federal level that discourage improper disposal.

A proposed EPA rule would prevent health care institutions from flushing pharmaceuticals, and some counties have extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws which require drug manufacturers set up take-back programs for the public.



Here in New York, continued funding in the state budget for pharmaceutical take-back programs for both residents and health care institutions coupled with a public education campaign are critical to keeping drugs out of our waters.

[For more information visit citizenscampaign.org](http://citizenscampaign.org)

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