

**A MESSAGE FROM  
ATTORNEY GENERAL  
MARK R. HERRING**

Proper disposal of prescription drugs is an emerging concern in the Commonwealth for two reasons. First, we want to ensure prescription drugs do not end up being diverted, and second, we don't want the chemicals in prescription drugs ending up in our drinking water.

We can work together as a community to minimize the availability of prescription drugs, which will lead to less abuse and diversion. We must also work to ensure our waterways are clean and contaminate free. I hope this brochure, in conjunction with more detailed information at [www.ag.virginia.gov](http://www.ag.virginia.gov), helps citizens learn the dangers of prescription drug diversion and contamination and ways in which to protect themselves, their children, and the environment.



**For more information visit**

[www.ag.virginia.gov](http://www.ag.virginia.gov)

**This brochure should not be construed as legal advice, as it is not intended as such.**

# Prescription Drug Abuse and Tips for Proper Disposal



*A production of the  
Office of the Attorney General  
Mark R. Herring*

**“Protecting Virginia’s  
most vulnerable citizens”**



## Prescription Drug Abuse:

Intentionally using medication without a prescription, using medication in a way other than prescribed, or recreationally experiencing the drug's effects constitutes abuse.

After marijuana, prescription drugs are the most commonly abused drugs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report in one month alone, nearly seven million Americans over the age of 12 reported abusing prescription medications. In fact, approximately 60 percent of people who abuse prescription painkillers indicate that they obtained the prescription drugs from friends or relatives for free, often taking the drugs without permission.

When prescription drugs are not properly disposed of, they become an easy target for diversion – which leads to abuse, unintentional overdosing, and even death.



## Environmental Contamination:

Many people believe that flushing or simply throwing away drugs is the best way to dispose of medications; however, if not disposed of properly, the drugs can contaminate the ground and waterways.



Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove or process many compounds found in medications. Instead, when flushed or put in a landfill, the drugs are discharged into our surface and ground water. Pharmaceutical contaminants in water have been shown to cause serious harm to fish and wildlife living in and near rivers and lakes. Humans can also be exposed to these chemicals when they drink water drawn from contaminated bodies of water or eat wild game or fish.

## Tips for the Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs:

**Drug Take-Back Programs** are the safest method for disposing of prescription drugs because they are organized and closely monitored by local, state, and federal government agencies. These agencies ensure and oversee the proper disposal of the drugs in accordance with federal law. Check with your pharmacist, local law enforcement agency, or the Attorney General's website ([www.ag.virginia.gov](http://www.ag.virginia.gov)) for more information on upcoming take-back programs.

**Home Disposal** has risks: diversion and environmental contamination. However, when completed correctly, home disposal is a viable option if a take back program is not available.

**Step 1** - Remove medications from their original containers. If the medication is solid, crush it or add water to dissolve it and then mix the medication with an undesirable substance, such as kitty litter or coffee grounds. This makes the mixture unattractive to children and pets and unrecognizable to potential abusers who may go through your trash.

**Step 2** - Place the mixture in a container with a lid or in a sealable baggie to prevent the medication from leaking, and throw it into the trash.

**Step 3** - When discarding the original containers, scratch out or remove identifiers on the bottle and/or packaging.

### **Remember:**

**DO NOT** dispose of medications in the toilet or sink, unless specifically instructed to on the label.

**DO NOT** give medicine to friends or family. This is not only potentially illegal, but a drug that works for you could be dangerous for someone else.

## **Tips for Safe Storage of Prescription Medication**

- **Get Organized** – Inventory your supply once every six months and check expiration dates.
- **Lock Them up** – An overwhelming majority of people who abuse prescription medication identify friends' and family's medicine cabinets as their source. Store your prescriptions, especially controlled substances, in a locked cabinet, drawer, or other secure location.
- **Be Safe** – Keep your medicine separate from anyone else's in your household and never mix medications in the same bottle. Remember to keep the lids on your pills bottles tightly closed and keep your medicine in the bottle it came in.



**Contact your pharmacists with any questions and for more helpful tips!**