

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES NEW GUIDELINES FOR PROPER DISPOSAL OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

(Washington, DC)- In the face of rising trends in prescription drug abuse, the Federal government today issued new guidelines for the proper disposal of unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs. The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) jointly released the new guidelines, which are designed to reduce the diversion of prescription drugs, while also protecting the environment.

The new Federal prescription drug disposal guidelines urge Americans to:

- Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers
- Mix the prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, like used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and put them in impermeable, non-descript containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags, further ensuring that the drugs are not diverted or accidentally ingested by children or pets
- Throw these containers in the trash
- Flush prescription drugs down the toilet only if the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so
- Return unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs to pharmaceutical take-back locations that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for safe disposal

Abuse of prescription drugs to get high has become increasingly prevalent among teens and young adults. Past year abuse of prescription pain killers abuse now ranks second- only behind marijuana- as the Nation's most prevalent illegal drug problem. While overall youth drug use is down by 23 percent since 2001, approximately 6.4 million Americans report non-medical use of prescription drugs. New abusers of prescription drugs have caught up with the number of new users of marijuana. Much of this abuse appears to be fueled by the relative ease of access to prescription drugs. Approximately 60 percent of people who abuse prescription pain killers indicate that they got their prescription drugs from a friend or relative for free.

John Walters, Director of National Drug Control Policy, said, "Millions of Americans benefit from the tremendous scientific achievements represented by modern pharmaceutical products. But, when abused, some prescription drugs can be as addictive and dangerous as illegal street drugs. The new prescription drug disposal guidelines will help us stop and prevent prescription drug abuse, and the harm it can cause.

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt said, "Health care providers, pharmacists, and family should be alert to the potential for prescription drug misuse, abuse, and dependence. In addition to supporting the new prescription drug disposal guidelines, they should address prescription drug misuse honestly and directly with their patients or loved ones when they suspect it. People in need should be encouraged to seek help for drug problems and if needed, enter treatment."

The new Federal guidelines are a balance between public health concerns and potential environmental concerns.

While EPA continues to research the effects of pharmaceuticals in water sources, one thing is clear: improper drug disposal is a prescription for environmental and societal concern," said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson. "Following these new guidelines will protect our Nation's waterways and keep pharmaceuticals out of the hands of potential abusers."

The new Federal prescription drug disposal guidelines go into effect immediately. As part of the National Drug Control Strategy, the Bush Administration has set a goal of reducing prescription drug abuse by 15 percent over three years. In addition to promoting awareness of the risks involved with using prescription drugs for non-medical purposes as well as they need for adults to strictly control access to pharmaceuticals within their homes, the Administration supports the implementation of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs at the State level. Currently, 33 States have such programs in place.

For more information, please visit www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov.