



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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METRO DISTRICT RECOMMENDS KITTY LITTER FOR DRUG DISPOSAL

DENVER, March 13 — The Metro Wastewater Reclamation District is aware of concerns generated by recent media stories about trace amounts of pharmaceuticals and personal care products being found in drinking water. The District is committed to protecting public health and the environment. It has been paying close attention to research being done in this arena for some time now and is providing funds to support this research.

“Being able to detect a substance does not mean it is harmful,” said Metro District biological scientist Dr. Todd L. Harris. “Scientists can now detect trace amounts of substances we could not find just a few short years ago. The next step is to find out whether those substances are harmful.”

To date, research throughout the world has not demonstrated an impact on human health from pharmaceuticals and endocrine disrupting compounds in drinking water. Research in this area is both ongoing and a high priority for the Metro District.

“Most of these chemicals have undoubtedly been in the water for decades, but we have only recently begun to be able to measure them,” Harris said.

“Normal wastewater treatment removes the vast majority of these substances, but we prefer that unused drugs not be flushed down the toilet because doing so introduces the drugs to the environment. Even though the amount from a single pill is small, the accumulation of these small amounts and the yet-unknown effects on aquatic life and the water environment concern us,” he said.

“A substantial amount of the pharmaceuticals that can be found in the water comes from human beings. The drugs our bodies don’t absorb are excreted, and that’s how they come to be found in wastewater,” Harris said.

The Metro District’s preferred option for disposing of unused pharmaceutical products is to take advantage of community pharmaceutical take-back programs that allow unused drugs to be brought to central locations such as pharmacies for proper disposal. Different pharmacies offer different programs. Some will take back drugs they sold, some take back all drugs, some take back none, and others offer solutions somewhere in between. Contact your local pharmacy.

The second option, which everyone can use, is to:

- Remove the prescription drug or medication from the original container and mix it with an undesirable substance such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter
- Put that mixture in a non-descript container that won’t leak such as an empty can or a sealable bag. This ensures the drugs aren’t diverted for non-medical use or are accidentally ingested by children or pets
- Dispose of these containers in the trash

The Metro Wastewater Reclamation District treats the wastewater for about 1.6 million people. It began treating wastewater in 1966 and is the largest wastewater treatment facility in the Rocky Mountain West. It treats almost 140 million gallons of wastewater a day. It is rated for a design flow of 227 million gallons a day (30-day average).

The Metro District's service area comprises 600 square miles and includes all of Denver and parts of Adams, Arapahoe and Jefferson Counties. Arvada, Aurora, Lakewood, Thornton, and part of Westminster are included.

Formed under Colorado law in 1961, the Metro District provides wholesale wastewater transmission and treatment service to 57 local governments, including both cities and sanitation districts in metropolitan Denver.

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