

MEDICINES (RETURN UNWANTED MEDICINES)

Hoarding old and unwanted medicines in your home can lead to the medicines becoming toxic, hazardous to children if left lying around, and misuse and abuse. Each week in Australia, fifty children are placed in hospital due to poisoning, in many cases as a result of improperly using medicine they have found within the home.

With 66.3 million prescribed medicines purchased throughout NSW each year, it is thought the majority of these (estimated at 200 tonnes throughout Australia) are either stored past their use by date or disposed of inappropriately, either in household garbage or down toilets and sinks (RUM). These medicines then become a significant and serious contributor to environmental issues such as water quality and contaminated land. For example, antibiotics and hormones are being found in waterways, with studies linking hormone exposure to reproductive side effects in fish (Associated Press).

While so, up until recently there has been few means of safe disposal that meets both state and hazardous waste guidelines. Since 1998, the Return Unwanted Medicines Project (or RUM Project for short) has been minimising the health and environmental risks of hoarding or disposing of medicines incorrectly and allows consumers to return unwanted or expired medicines to ANY pharmacy in Australia at no cost, which are then disposed of correctly and safely through special incineration out of our waterways and away from our children.

REFERENCES:

Return Unwanted Medicines, online at www.returnmed.com.au

Associated Press, online at <http://stacks.msnbc.com/news/963537.asp?cp1=1>

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Do not buy more medicine than you think you will require and do not use expired medicines
- Do not hoard, flush, pour down the sink or throw your old medicines out in the rubbish.
- Return expired and unwanted medicines to any pharmacy in Australia, where they are collected and disposed of at high temperatures.

MORE INFORMATION

- <http://www.returnmed.com.au/> - info on the Return Unwanted Medicines scheme
- <http://www.opal.org.au/i.cfm/96> - Opal waste collects the unwanted medicines from the pharmacies to be disposed of correctly. It is also a subsidiary of Overseas Pharmaceutical Aid for Life who collect medicines for overseas aid.
- <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/medical.htm> - an overview of how the US deals with home medicine waste.