

## PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS (PCPs)

Many consumer products for body care & comfort also put unnatural chemicals into septic systems and wastewater facilities.

Traces pass through or wash off our bodies, and many can't be removed by wastewater treatment plants. They can end up in groundwater, rivers, and lakes, damaging fish and other aquatic wildlife. Some can show up in public drinking water sources.

Common PCPs that contain harmful chemicals include perfume, hair dye, hair gel, home permanent kits, insect repellent, sunscreen, deodorant, body washes, fungicides, cosmetics, shaving products, steroid creams, and antimicrobial lotions. Nail polish remover are particularly toxic.

And it's not just about wildlife. Health authorities also consider these to be "contaminants of emerging concern" that can be detrimental to human health.

For example, the U.S. EPA warns, "Emissions of siloxane, a common ingredient in shampoos, lotions, and deodorants, are comparable in magnitude to the emissions of major components of vehicle exhaust, such as benzene, from rush-hour traffic."

Doesn't the government regulate them? No, not much. PCPs are not food, so their safety is not tested or controlled by the Food and Drug Administration.

## PCP SOLUTIONS

**Never pour or flush** unwanted or leftover PCPs, including pet shampoos and flea treatments. Just seal the container tightly and throw it in the trash.

**Avoid buying** highly-perfumed hair or skin products; limit use of antibacterial washes and lotions.

**Check ingredients.** Some brands are more harmful than others. For example, sunscreen residues are highly damaging to marine environments; the solution is simply to avoid buying brands that contain oxybenzone and octinoxate.

**Skip these if you can.** PCPs contain thousands of chemicals; some aren't so bad, but others show up frequently in health and environmental warnings. Among the "top ten worst":

- Phthalates
- Parabens
- Formaldehyde
- Siloxane (drug name often ends in -methicone)
- Diethanolamine (DEA)

**Learn more:** Visit [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov), [www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com), or [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com) and search "personal care products" or "PCPs."

# DON'T FLUSH IT!



VOLUME 2:

## DRUGS! & Personal Care Products

How to protect your health - and the environment - by knowing what NOT to flush or pour into your septic tank or municipal sewer system.

Pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) should not go into toilets or sinks. These man-made chemicals are common in every home, but can enter ground and surface waters and harm human and ecosystem health.

## DRUGS!

**Never dispose of any medication -- whether prescription or over-the-counter -- in your sink drain or toilet!**

Septic systems and wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove pharmaceuticals. These unnatural chemicals can linger in groundwater, rivers, and lakes, harming fish, frogs, and other wildlife. Traces can show up in drinking water sources, with negative health effects on humans. Also, some antibiotics and antibacterials can impair performance of septic systems and wastewater facilities.

Unused antibiotics, birth control pills, anti-seizure medications, anti-depressants, diet pills, painkillers, hormone supplements, antibacterials, nasal sprays, cough medicines, mood stabilizers, sleep aids - whether pill, liquid, cream, spray, or patch - should be disposed of so they can't be abused by someone else or enter your wastewater stream.



## PHARMACEUTICAL SOLUTIONS

**Drop them off.** Vermont's free drug drop-off disposal program offers 84 sites throughout the state. To find one near you, call (802) 651-1550, or visit:

[www.healthvermont.gov/alcohol-drugs/services/prescription-drug-disposal](http://www.healthvermont.gov/alcohol-drugs/services/prescription-drug-disposal)

You can also request a free envelope by which to mail unused medications for safe disposal.

**Trash them.** The Water Environment Federation recommends:

1. If disposing of a prescription drug, cross out any personal information on your medicine bottle.
2. Empty the medicine into a sealable, disposable container. Add cat litter, coffee grounds, or other undesirable substance to discourage abuse.
3. Dispose of the sealed container in your household trash. Don't compost or incinerate.

This is the second of four brochures produced by Green Mountain Water Environment Association (GMWEA), thanks to a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program, with project support from Vermont League of Cities and Towns and your municipality. Future editions will cover other pollutants typical households flush, pour, spill into their wastewater stream.

GMWEA sincerely thanks the Castleton Content Lab of Castleton University for brochure design and illustrations!



Green Mountain  
Water Environment  
Association

89 Main Street, Ste. 4  
Montpelier, VT 05602  
(802) 229-9111 • [www.gmwea.org](http://www.gmwea.org)

©2019. Publication free for public, nonprofit use



This project was funded by agreement LC00A00394 awarded by the Environmental Protection Agency to the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission in partnership with the Lake Champlain Basin Program. NEIWPC manages LCBP's personnel, contract, grant, and budget tasks and provides input on the program's activities through a partnership with the LCBP Steering Committee. Although the information in this document has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under agreement LC00A00394 to NEIWPC, it has not undergone the Agency's publications review process and therefore viewpoints expressed here may not necessarily reflect the views of the Agency and no official endorsement should be inferred. The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of NEIWPC, the LCBP Steering Committee, or EPA, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or causes constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.