



News from the Office of
ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ

NEWS RELEASE

**Health Commissioner
Dr. Gale Burstein**

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BURSTEIN ISSUES ALERT ON NEW WATER POLLUTION

Commissioner Raises Concern on Water Pollution, Tells Public "Don't Flush Your PPCP's"

ERIE COUNTY, NY— PPCP's (pharmaceuticals and personal care products) represent a new form of water pollution. Each day, antibiotics, vitamins, pain medications, hormonal supplements, over-the-counter and prescription medications are finding their way into the environment, including the waters of the Great Lakes region. PPCP's can cause harm if disposed of improperly when no longer needed or expired.

"You should talk with your doctor to avoid accumulating unwanted or unused medicines that will require disposal. Finish an entire prescription as prescribed. Take unwanted/expired medicines to local "drop-off" events or other take-back programs. If one is not available in your area you can dispose of unwanted PPCP's by mixing unwanted medicines with kitty litter, fireplace ashes, or coffee grounds in a sturdy container", **said Burstein**. "Never flush medicines down the toilet or pour them down the drain unless the label specifically advises you to do so."

Bioactive chemical substances in PPCP's affect the living tissues of the body and enter the environment in several ways. PPCP's can be excreted as waste with compounds not completely metabolized by the body. They are also flushed down the toilet by people thinking they are properly disposing of unused/unwanted medicines. Many bioactive chemicals are not removed by standard wastewater plant treatment operations, and enter the environment through wastewater sludge, fertilizer/soil supplement, and improperly built landfills. These toxins can be deemed as wastewater effluent. This seepage can enter our environment from animal waste from feedlots and aquaculture facilities near streams, creeks, and other water bodies.

The Great Lakes are a source of drinking water for 42 million people in the U.S. and Canada. In the last 100 years, we have added tons of toxins to our freshwater system. This supply continuously cycles through our air, soils, and waters. Alterations caused by antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals on bacteria at the base of our aquatic food webs will be felt well up the food chain as fish and other organisms consume the various levels of food sources. Pharmaceutical-based changes in behavior and reproduction have already been documented in frogs, mussels, and other freshwater organisms.

“If we all learn to properly dispose of unwanted or unused medicines, we will be reducing an environmental threat and its potential impacts on our vital Great Lakes aquatic ecosystem,” **Burstein added.** “When PPCP’s are properly disposed, children and pets are less likely to be poisoned. Also, illegal drug use and identity theft from personal information found on prescription containers are diminished as well.”

For more information on PPCP disposal, visit

www.unwantedmeds.org

For more information on the Erie County Health Department, visit

<http://www.2erie.gov/health/>

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