

## Keeping Pharmaceuticals Out of New York Waters

**W**hen pharmaceuticals are flushed down the toilet or sink, the chemicals in these substances may pass through wastewater treatment facilities and end up in fresh and marine waters, negatively impacting wildlife.

Residents are being told not to flush or pour unwanted pharmaceuticals down their drains and, instead, to dispose of these items in the trash or at a collection event. Some residents are concerned that disposing of unwanted pharmaceuticals in the trash will lead to misuse or delayed environmental effects. Most do not know where to find out about upcoming collection events. Others are unaware of the harmful effects of flushing unwanted pharmaceuticals.

### Creating a Local Solution

Stony Brook Medical Center contacted New York Sea Grant (NYSG) in response to a letter from Suffolk County Legislator Lynne Nowick asking local hospitals to organize collection events for unwanted medicines.

NYSG's Long Island Sound Study Outreach Coordinator contacted representatives of Stony Brook University, Legislator Nowick's office, the Suffolk County Health Department, Suffolk County Police Department Narcotics Unit, and Triumvirate Environmental Inc. Together, these groups organized an event to collect unwanted pharmaceuticals from residents.

The collection event was held in April 2009. Almost 500 pounds of unwanted pharmaceuticals were collected from 140 residents. In total, more than 90,000 pills were returned, including 2,059 containers of non-controlled substances and 147 containers of controlled substances.



*Above: Pharmacists from Stony Brook Medical Center volunteered to sort and record the nearly 500 pounds of pharmaceuticals (right) collected during the April 2009 event that New York Sea Grant helped to organize and sponsor. Photos: Barbara Branca, NYSG*



The collected items were sent to a hazardous waste incinerator that destroyed 99% of the chemicals in the pharmaceuticals.

After the event, NYSG and the event committee members compiled a "How To" guide to assist other New York-based agencies and community groups interested in holding a collection event. This guide is available online at <http://www.seagrant.sunysb.edu/article.asp?ArticleID=362>.

NYSG posts upcoming collection events online and is creating additional educational materials to distribute to community members.

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**This project meets the performance measures of Sea Grant's Healthy New York Coastal Ecosystems focus area.**

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