

Keeping Unwanted Medicines Out of the Great Lakes

Each day through the improper disposal of pharmaceuticals and personal care products we add unwanted toxins to the finite system of freshwater that is the Great Lakes. In 2011, New York Sea Grant (NYSG) shared this important message with stakeholders to help them learn what they can do to reduce this troubling form of water pollution and thereby protect New York's aquatic environments.

"Don't Rush to Flush" became the motto used to teach stakeholders about the dangers of flushing or improperly disposing of unwanted or unused over-the-counter medications, pharmaceuticals, and personal care products (PPCPs).

Students enrolled in the NYSG-taught Great Lakes Ecology course at the University of Buffalo tackled the problems associated with PPCPs going down the drains of households around the Great Lakes. Their creativity and genuine concern were evident in the public awareness projects they designed to educate others.

Some student groups used Facebook and Twitter to reach thousands of their friends and contacts to survey their behaviors and knowledge about the use and proper disposal of PPCPs. The survey results indicated that a majority of people lacked awareness about the problems or proper disposal techniques.

Other students developed posters and stickers they displayed around the University, targeting dorms and restroom facilities on campus. Their goal was to encourage students to think before they flush! Stickers for bathroom mirrors in the dorms and student apartments asked: *"What are YOU putting down the drain?"* These



"Food for Thought:" University of Buffalo students shared pill-shaped cookies with classmates to inform them about the impacts of improper disposal of pharmaceuticals. Photo: Helen Domske, NYSG

stickers included information for reducing the amount of personal care products used and proper disposal of unwanted/unused medicines.

NYSG also reached out to stakeholders, anglers and teachers as a means of informing others about the dangers of releasing the PPCPs into the environment. Utilizing a newly produced NYSG fact sheet: *"Undo the Environmental Chemical Brew: Keep Unwanted Medications & Chemicals Out of the Great Lakes"* and promotional pieces encouraged interested citizens to learn more about the issue at www.unwantedmeds.org.

A series of newspaper, radio and television public service announcements helped to get this important message out to tens of thousands of New York residents along the coasts of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

Partial funding for this project was provided through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

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

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