



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

JUL 12 2016

OFFICE OF  
SOLID WASTE AND  
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

NOW THE  
OFFICE OF LAND AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Dr. Wayne Riley  
President  
American College of Physicians  
25 Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Dr. Riley:

Thank you for your letter to Administrator Gina McCarthy dated May 3, 2016, in which you express concerns regarding negative effects to the environment from the improper disposal of waste pharmaceuticals. You noted that there have been a number of studies indicating the presence of pharmaceuticals in wastewater, ground water and surface water. You have also indicated your support of efforts to discourage drain disposal by educating the public, physicians and other health care providers about potential environmental dangers of drain disposal, as well as to expand disposal programs for unused/unwanted medication to prevent diversion and misuse.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agrees that the sewerage (i.e., flushing and sink disposal) of pharmaceuticals contributes to the presence of these substances in surface and drinking water. As scientific studies suggest, the presence of pharmaceutical active compounds in waterways can affect aquatic ecosystems and may have the potential to present risks to human health. As you noted in your letter, one of the provisions of our proposed Management Standards for Hazardous Waste Pharmaceuticals rule (Pharmaceuticals rule) prohibits healthcare facilities from sewerage pharmaceuticals that are hazardous wastes. This proposed sewer ban reinforces and highlights EPA's policy against flushing pharmaceuticals. Although the sewer ban in the EPA's proposed Pharmaceuticals rule is limited to hazardous waste pharmaceuticals, as a best management practice, we encourage healthcare facilities not to sewer any waste pharmaceuticals.

Moreover, consistent with EPA's policy, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) no longer allows sewerage as a means of destroying controlled substances. The DEA finalized regulations dated September 9, 2014 (79 FR 53520), implementing the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act of 2010. These regulations require a "non-retrievable" method of destruction of controlled substances and specifically do not include sewerage as a disposal option.

Additionally, the EPA and other federal agencies such as the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have been coordinating to educate consumers to stop sewerage

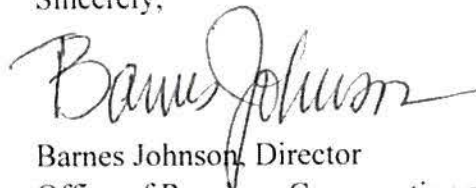
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waste pharmaceuticals. This includes properly managing waste pharmaceuticals through pharmaceutical take-back programs, mail-back programs and trash disposal under certain conditions.

In closing, the EPA fully agrees that the practice of sewerage waste pharmaceuticals should be discouraged whenever possible and, to this end, we will continue to work with our partners in federal, state and local government, as well as the regulated community, to ensure that waste pharmaceuticals are safely managed. Partners such as your organization help amplify our message and we appreciate your organization's work on this important issue.

If you have any questions or wish to further discuss this matter, please feel free to contact either Kristin Fitzgerald or Drew Lausch of my staff. Kristin Fitzgerald can be reached at [fitzgerald.kristin@epa](mailto:fitzgerald.kristin@epa) or 703-308-8286 and Drew Lausch can be reached at [lausch.robert@epa.gov](mailto:lausch.robert@epa.gov) or 703-603-0721.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barnes Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barnes" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Johnson".

Barnes Johnson, Director  
Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery

cc: Kolton Gustafson, American College of Physicians  
Hyon Kim, Office of the Administrator (EPA)  
Office of Land and Emergency Management (EPA)  
Office of Public Affairs (EPA)  
Office of Research and Development Immediate Office (EPA)  
Office of Water Immediate Office (EPA)