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California Product Stewardship Council and Others Urge Federal Agencies to Revise Recommendations for Safe Medicine Disposal

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SACRAMENTO, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan 26, 2016--More than 100 environmental and health organizations, agencies, activists and even state legislators sent a signed a letter to Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Stephen Ostroff urging the FDA to end its “flush list” recommendation. The group instead suggested creating a single disposal guidance system, such as a secure medicine take-back program, that is endorsed by all federal agencies and is consistently communicated on all federal websites and materials. The coalition also encouraged the FDA to work more closely with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to develop clear and consistent guidance for consumers regarding the safe disposal of leftover household medications.

“Right now there is a real disconnect between the FDA and other federal agencies about the proper way of disposing unused medications,” said Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director of the National Stewardship Action Council, an affiliated organization to the California Product Stewardship Council. “The FDA must end its recommendation of flushing medications, which has a negative impact on public health and water quality. Instead, by supporting take back programs and sending one unified message, we can increase the public’s trust of their government to protect their water supply.”

The organizations state that flushing of medications contributes to pharmaceutical pollution in the environment. The amount of leftover and expired medications in American homes is significant – an estimated 30-40 percent goes unused. Medicine take-back programs are the

safest way to dispose of unwanted medications. However, messages on medicine disposal are inconsistent between federal agencies and often conflict with state and local regulations or guidance against flushing or trash disposal of these medications.

"Prevention at the source is the best way to keep pharmaceuticals out of wastewater and the environment," said Bobbi Larson, Executive Director for the California Association of Sanitation Agencies. "Unused medications are frequently flushed down the toilet and make their way into wastewater streams and ultimately the environment. No drugs should be flushed, and providing a list of acceptable pharmaceuticals to flush to the public sends a message that it's okay to flush pollutants down the toilet."

By ensuring all organizations are working together promoting the same method for safe medication disposal, we can avoid mixed messages and environmentally unfriendly practices.

"Flushing drugs should be completely off the table," said Andria Ventura, Toxics Program Manager for Clean Water Action California. "Instead, federal agencies should promote convenient collection programs of unused household medications for consumers."

To review a copy of the letter sent to the FDA that includes clear messaging suggestions for adoption on safe medicine disposal, please visit www.calpsc.org.