Federal Guidelines:

- Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers and throw them in the trash.

- Mixing prescription drugs with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter, and putting them in impermeable, non-descript containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags, will further ensure the drugs are not diverted.

- Flush prescription drugs down the toilet only if the label or accompanying patient information specifically instructs doing so (see box).

- Take advantage of community pharmaceutical take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Some communities have pharmaceutical take-back programs or community solid-waste programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Where these exist, they are a good way to dispose of unused pharmaceuticals.

The FDA advises that the following drugs be flushed down the toilet instead of thrown in the trash:

- Actiq (fentanyl citrate)
- Daytrana Transdermal Patch (methylphenidate)
- Duragesic Transdermal System (fentanyl)
- OxyContin Tablets (oxycodone)
- Avinza Capsules (morphine sulfate)
- Baraclude Tablets (entecavir)
- Reyataz Capsules (atazanavir sulfate)
- Tequin Tablets (gatifloxacin)
- Zerit for Oral Solution (stavudine)
- Meperidine HCl Tablets
- Percocet (Oxycodone and Acetaminophen)
- Xyrem (Sodium Oxybate)
- Fentora (fentanyl buccal tablet)

Note: Patients should always refer to printed material accompanying their medication for specific instructions.