

## I Don't Flush is Born...

### OCWA Campaign Urges Public to Return Unused Medications

A dedicated team from the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) came up with a creative way to encourage the public to properly dispose of unused/unwanted pharmaceuticals. In October 2014, OCWA – in partnership with non-profit The Clean Water Foundation (CWF) – launched the I Don't Flush public awareness campaign. With their multi-faceted approach, including a microsite, social media presence and broadcast/radio public service announcement (PSA), the team helped contribute to a 10% increase in pharmaceutical take-back across targeted regions in Ontario. Through 2015, the campaign had generated over 30 million media impressions and helped the public understand that small, everyday actions can contribute to a cleaner environment.

The campaign asked the public to return their unused/unwanted medications back to the pharmacy as opposed to flushing them down the toilet or drain, or throwing them in the garbage. A fun, and somewhat cheeky, PSA was created to bring this issue to the forefront and it featured an onslaught of support from notable Ontarians including: ET Canada's Rick Campanelli, TVO's The Water Brothers, TSN's Cabbie Richards, former Mississauga Mayor, Hazel McCallion, and many others. The PSA was housed on the microsite ([www.idontflush.ca](http://www.idontflush.ca)), which also provides information on other non-flushables.

Support from the Partnership for a Drug Free Canada helped get the campaign off to a strong start, with CEO Marc Paris joining OCWA and CWF at a media launch held during the 2014 Green Living Show in Toronto. The OCWA team also looked to the Health Product Stewardship Association (HPSA) for their guidance regarding research and statistics on pharmaceutical take-back in Ontario. They allowed us to direct our website visitors to an important tool that helps the public locate a local pharmacy for take-back.

The team also approached several municipalities to secure the necessary funding for the project. The team worked closely with Ontario municipalities, Region of Peel and York Region, throughout the campaign, attending community events and contacting pharmacists to do on-site take-back.

#### **A Huge Impact!**

By 2015, the PSA was aired over 2,000 times across 20 Canadian television networks and six radio stations, and had garnered over 30 million media impressions thanks to CTV News, Rogers Cable, local print publications – including Water Canada – and social media pick-up.

**Most importantly, the message stuck – With (according to the HPSA) pharmaceutical take-back increasing up to 10% in targeted regions during the run of the campaign. This means that the I Don't Flush campaign had a measurable impact. Pharmaceutical waste was diverted from lakes and rivers and kept out of**

**the hands of approximately 450,000 Canadian kids who have taken prescription medications NOT prescribed to them.**

Due to the success of the campaign, the OCWA team, along with CWF, is working on Phase II of the I Don't Flush program, with a focus on personal hygiene non-flushables.

Phase II rolls out in Spring 2016 with support from York Region, City of Barrie, Niagara Region, Town of Mississippi Mills and Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury.