SAFE MEDICATION DISPOSAL GUIDE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, doctors wrote 259 million prescriptions for painkillers in 2012. That amounts to a one month supply of opioid painkillers for every person in the U. S. Many families have stockpiles of leftover and expired medicines in their homes.

Whether the pills are kept for future use or because people don’t know how to properly get rid of them, these leftover drugs make it easy for teens and adults to access. More than a quarter of teens mistakenly believe misusing or abusing prescription drugs to get high is safer than using street drugs. One-third believe it is okay to use prescription drugs that were not prescribed to them for treating an injury, illness or physical pain. (The Partnership at Drugfree.org, 2013) In fact, more than 70 percent of drug users said they access prescription drugs from family members or friends (SAMHSA 2013).

This easily accessed supply of leftover prescription drugs contributes to our current drug overdose epidemic. Local leaders in many communities are working together to start medication disposal programs to reduce the supply of leftover drugs. Among the many benefits, these programs help prevent:

- Children from unintentionally eating unused medication
- Misuse and theft
- Unsafe levels of contaminants entering local rivers, lakes, and streams

Learn the ins and outs of safe medication disposal. This guide explains how communities can start or enhance a medication disposal program and educate the public.
WHO CAN COLLECT LEFTOVER PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS?

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has rules about who can legally handle controlled substances – legally prescribed medications defined by the DEA as very addictive or easily abused. Any police officer or department can receive leftover controlled substances for disposal directly from the public. Recent changes now allow some DEA registered controlled substance permit holders to join police in collecting and disposing of unwanted drugs. DEA permit holders allowed to take back unwanted drugs include:

- Drug manufacturers
- Distributors
- Reverse distributors
- Narcotic treatment programs
- Hospitals and clinics with an on-site pharmacy
- Retail pharmacies

Before pharmacies, hospitals and other permit holders can start a drug take-back program, there are some requirements. Permit holders must modify their original DEA registration to allow them to collect unwanted drugs from the public. The DEA also has some extra requirements to ensure drugs are destroyed and don’t end up in the wrong hands. Read the DEA guidelines for more information at http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/index.html

Be sure to also check whether your state has regulations for medication disposal or if it requires a special permit or permission to hold a take-back event.
There are three types of disposal programs: permanent collection sites, take-back events and mail-back programs. Before starting these programs, it’s important to know a little about them to help decide which one(s) will work best in your community.

PERMANENT COLLECTION SITES

Permanent collection sites are typically collection boxes anchored outside of or in a building lobby. Most permanent collection sites are located at police and sheriff’s offices. The best sites are highly visible, marked with instructional signage and easy access at different times of day. Factors to consider when deciding the location for drug collection boxes include:

- Need - which neighborhoods or communities have high overdose rate
- Convenience – identify locations that are convenient to community residents
- Type of location – if possible, place boxes in a variety of sites including hospitals, pharmacies and law enforcement agencies. Each location will attract a different cross-section of your community

TAKE-BACK EVENTS

Take-back events are scheduled and highly-publicized opportunities for the public to bring their unwanted drugs for disposal. Temporary collection boxes are brought to the location by the sponsoring organization. Volunteers direct the public to the collection boxes where they can dispose of their unwanted medications. Police officers are required to be on hand to oversee and maintain custody of the collected drugs until they are destroyed. Take-back events work best when actively promoted and located at large community events and festivals, or locations that appeal to a number of different audiences (i.e. grocery store, farmers’ market, senior center or schools).

MAIL-BACK PROGRAMS

Until recently, only non-controlled substances could be disposed of in mail-back programs. Pharmacies or “reverse distributors” can collect unused prescription drugs through a mail-in program. While this might sound easy, it’s not as simple as tossing prescription drugs in an envelope and placing a stamp on it. The operators of the mail-back program must have an on-site incinerator or other means to destroy the drugs that complies with the DEA rules. Pharmacies or communities may partner with the operator of a mail-in program.

Two examples of these programs are the Yellow Jug Old Drug and MedSafe. These programs provide a collection receptacle and individually numbered liners to pharmacies and other approved locations. The collection receptacles are placed in a convenient location for customers to deposit their unneeded medications. When full, two pharmacy staff members record and remove the numbered liners. The liners are sealed and shipped using the preprinted packaging to the designated incinerator or waste disposal facility.

In the MedSafe program pharmacies purchase replacement liners for a reasonable monthly fee that includes shipping and disposal costs. Annual costs for one location with a monthly liner purchase and shipment would be approximately $3,000. In the Yellow Jug program, pharmacies pay a small annual fee, $300 and a $100 deposit for a lock box if collecting controlled substances.
WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Starting and promoting a medication disposal program will often involve partnerships with many different organizations in your community. Two key partners are your local law enforcement agencies and your municipal solid waste and environmental management department. The police department or sheriff’s office are logical partners as they must be present at take-back events and permanent collection boxes have fewer restrictions when placed at a law enforcement agency. Your local solid waste/environmental management office or water treatment department may also be helpful as medication disposal programs remove these drugs from the landfill and sewage system. They may be familiar with your state’s regulations and, sometimes, they may have access to state funding or grants to pay for the destruction of the collected drugs.

Other important partners may include:

- City or county government
- Pharmacies
- Hospitals
- Medical providers
- Drug and alcohol treatment providers
- Schools, education professionals and student organizations
- Community, professional and fraternal organizations
- Family members struggling with prescription drug overdose

These partners may be willing to be the site of a permanent collection box, actively promote the program to their customers or the public or provide a donation or funding.
HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

A drug collection box may range from $400 to $800 dollars. Disposal costs for the collected drugs can vary depending on the amount of drugs collected and geographic location of your community. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends destroying the drugs by incineration. The incinerators should meet the EPA standards. Incinerators may not be located close to your community, requiring the drugs to be transported. This increases the cost.

In Dane County, Wis., for example, it costs approximately $28,000 to transport and destroy the 4.6 tons of unwanted drugs collected annually. In Illinois, the Village of New Lenox Police Department partners with Will County Land Use Department which includes and destroys collected drugs as part of a county-wide medication disposal program. Without this partnership, the small community would find it difficult to provide this service to the community. Innovative technology as used in the Yellow Jug Old Drug program and new companies entering this market as such as MedSafe have the potential to greatly reduce the costs associated with medication disposal. These programs expand safe medication disposal options for the consumer while making it easier for pharmacies to participate in community medication disposal efforts.

Today, many drug collection programs are funded by state governments, pharmacies and other partners that help to pay for disposing the drugs. However, a few communities like Alameda County, CA and King County, WA have enacted municipal ordinances that require pharmaceutical producers to pay for the costs associated with disposal of their products.
One key to successful drug take-back events and medication disposal programs is actively marketing your event and permanent collection locations. A variety of methods should be used to inform the public including posters, flyers, news articles and other advertising. A number of states and communities have launched successful public education campaigns to inform the public about the need to safely dispose of unwanted medications. Often communities can, with permission, use these public education campaigns. Sometimes your local newspapers, radio or television stations will donate advertising as a community service.
HELPFUL RESOURCES

Product Stewardship Institute Go to Guide for Safe Drug Take-Back
Yellow Jug Old Drugs
MedSafe
Americana Medicine Chest Challenge
Prescription for Safety Program
MedReturn Drug Collection Unit - Locations and Resources
Green Pharmacy Program (Teleosis Institute)

RESOURCES FOR HOLDING A DRUG TAKE-BACK COLLECTION EVENT

Video Series - How to Organize a Collection for Household Pharmaceutical Waste; Ed Gottlieb, Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility, NY
Project Drug Drop. National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI)

STATE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Washington Take Back Your Meds Coalition
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Collecting Unwanted Household Pharmaceuticals
Use Only As Directed Educational Campaign