NEW SAFE DISPOSAL OPTIONS!

Drug take-back bins let you safely dispose of unwanted, unneeded, or expired medications

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SNAPSHOT OF CALIFORNIA OPIOID USE

Opioid prescriptions in California are decreasing, thanks to a concentrated effort to fight this crisis. But a lot of work still needs to be done.

Drug-related overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S. More than three out of five drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.

But the numbers don’t stop there. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for every person who dies of an opioid overdose...

12 people are admitted to a treatment program
25 are seen for complications in an emergency room
105 report opioid addiction or dependence
659 report using opioids for non-medical or non-prescribed purposes

In 2018, health officials tallied these opioid-related statics:

California

2,428 deaths
8,832 emergency room visits
19.8 million prescriptions

Del Norte County

0 deaths
13 emergency department visits
27,049 prescriptions

Humboldt County

16 deaths
60 emergency department visits
121,113 prescriptions

Mendocino County

14 deaths
26 emergency department visits
87,550 prescriptions

Sonoma County

43 deaths
220 emergency department visits
346,619 prescriptions

Trinity County

2 deaths
4 emergency department visits
13,235 prescriptions

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A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Learn how and why disposing of unused medication is important—and easy

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

We have all had the experience: Maybe your spouse didn’t need the painkillers prescribed for recovery from surgery; maybe your teenager didn’t use all of his acne medication because of side effects; maybe your elderly grandparent passed away, leaving a shoe box filled with prescription drugs.

If unused medications are thrown away in a garbage can, it is still possible that they may be illegally diverted. If drugs are flushed down a toilet or washed down the sink, they may end up in our landfills and waterways, harming wildlife and entering our drinking water.

Fortunately, there is an easy answer: Medication Take-Back Bins. These bins are safe and convenient disposal options for prescription and over-the-counter medications.

These convenient bins are a part of the California Statewide Drug Take-Back Program, which was funded by a $3 million grant from the Department of Health Care Services, and — specifically — its Medication Assisted Treatment program aimed at combating the opioid crisis. This is a prelude to the statewide bill, Senate Bill 212, which was signed into law by then-Gov. Jerry Brown on Sept. 30, 2018. SB 212 was a years-long effort by the California Product Stewardship Council and its authors, State Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assemblymembers Phil Ting and Adam Gray. In fact, statistics from up and down the state show that medication bins can result in a significant reduction in opioid deaths when bins are put in place.

Hosting a bin through this program is easy and free—installation, maintenance, disposal and promotion. Bins can be placed in pharmacies, hospitals and law enforcement agencies. People disposing of medications in these bins can also remain anonymous—no need to talk to anyone or answer any questions.

“The bins are very convenient, just to have that access,” says Jennifer Lombari, general manager of Mendo Recycle, which is responsible for emptying about 220 pounds of pharmaceuticals every quarter from the area’s bins.

“We have one at the sheriff’s office, the senior center, some pharmacies. They just give us a call and say, ‘OK, the bin is full.’”

Jennifer Lombari, general manager
Mendo Recycle

“Where do you get rid of them safely?”

And safely is the operative word here, because unused medications that are not disposed of properly can cause a myriad of serious public safety concerns. For example, if unused medications stay in your medicine cabinet, they can fall into the hands of a child or teenager, who could accidentally overdose or begin an addiction. Criminals searching for drugs, especially opioids, may come into your house posing as a prospective homebuyer—or attempt a break-in.

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“We have one at the sheriff’s office, the senior center, some pharmacies. They just give us a call and say, ‘OK, the bin is full.’” (It’s also important) to give people one more reason not to just throw (medications) in the garbage.”

And best of all, the drugs are ultimately incinerated at a waste-to-energy facility and converted to renewable energy, a complete win-win.
A long with the power to heal, medications also have the potential to cause harm when misused or improperly discarded. Drug take-back bins provide safe and convenient ways to keep unused medications out of the environment and out of the hands of those who would misuse them.

“We really like to have collection programs that are as close as possible to the place of purchase,” says Tedd Ward, Director of the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority. “It should be as easy to properly dispose of unwanted meds as it was to purchase them in the first place. There really has to be a place for those prescription medications to go.”

**Don’t rush to flush**

Even in the recent past, people were advised to flush unused medications down the drain. Unfortunately, what gets flushed down the toilet can pollute the same watersheds that often supply communities’ drinking water.

“Flush[ing] medicines down the toilet can cause problems in wastewater treatment plants because no wastewater treatment plant is suited to remove these medicines,” Ward says. “They are suspended in the liquids that are discharged to the rivers and ocean. That’s an issue because these things are biologically active.”

**Not getting rid of unused medications has its risks**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 130 Americans die daily from opioid overdoses. In 2017, 36% of those opioid-related deaths involved prescription medications. Those medications also pose a risk to children and teens. Two-thirds of teens who admit to abusing painkillers say they got them out of home medicine cabinets. And each year, approximately 50,000 children under age 5 end up in emergency departments because of accidental poisoning.

**A better option**

Ward says that one of the biggest obstacles to using medication take-back bins is simply the public’s lack of awareness that such a resource exists.

“Many people aren’t aware that medications shouldn’t be disposed of in the trash or flushed down the toilet. Breaking bad habits is the first step,” he says. “I really appreciate the work of the California Product Stewardship Council in helping deploy and promote the use of these bins. They do really important work of identifying hazardous or problematic elements in the waste stream and working with the producer of those products to develop programs so they’re managed more responsibly at the end of their life.”

To find a med bin near you, visit www.takebackdrugs.org.
More than half of all American adults take at least one prescription medication daily, with even more medications prescribed that are never taken.

In California, 7 out of 10 opioid-related overdose deaths are due to prescription drugs.

Don’t store them at home

- Those drugs may be taken by young children
- Or stolen by teens, family members, or visitors
- Which can lead to accidental overdoses

Don’t flush them down the toilet

- Waste water treatment plants cannot remove drugs
- Leading to contamination of our streams, rivers, and lakes
- Which is harmful to animals, plants, and people

Don’t leave drugs for someone else to take

7 out of 10
According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 9.9 million Americans misuse controlled prescription drugs each year. The study showed the majority of abused prescription drugs were obtained from family and friends, often from the home medicine cabinet and without their knowledge.

Don’t throw them in the trash

- These drugs may be taken out of the trash by others
- Which can lead to illegal use or sale
- Which fuels the opioid epidemic

Drop them off in a drug take-back bin

- You can discard of your drugs safely, conveniently, and anonymously
- They are completely destroyed through thermal destruction
- Therefore, they will not enter the environment

9.9 million

Nearly 9,000 emergency room visits in California annually are attributed to opioid drug overdoses.
CALIFORNIA LEADS THE NATION IN ADDRESSING ISSUES THAT ARE VITAL TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT. ONE CRUCIAL PIECE IS THE CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE DRUG TAKE-BACK PROGRAM, FUNDED BY THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND ADMINISTERED BY THE CALIFORNIA PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (CPSC).

The program targets the opioid crisis and the mishandling of other controlled and over-the-counter drugs. At its heart is a statewide network of Medication Take-Back Bins, placed in pharmacies, hospitals with pharmacies, and law-enforcement agencies for public use.

Residents of counties across the state can anonymously deposit unused and expired medications into the bins, rather than endanger the environment and possibly lives by stockpiling them at home, flushing them down the toilet, or throwing them in the trash. The discarded drugs are incinerated at waste-to-energy plants.

In one way or another, thousands of people touch this chain of events, including Lisa Steinman, Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst for the Sonoma County Department of Health Services in Santa Rosa.

Steinman has worked on Sonoma County’s Safe Medicine Disposal Program (SMDP) since its inception in 2007. It provides county residents with safe and convenient methods for disposal of unwanted medications in an effort to help prevent overdoses and to protect the environment,” she says. To date, it has collected nearly 140,000 pounds of medications.

“CPSC has been with us throughout SMDP’s implementation,” Steinman says. “Together with all of our partners, we’ve created a really robust program that gets a lot of buy-in (through) outreach and educational programs.”

Currently, the county offers a combination of 25 take-back bins and mail-back envelope distribution sites. The mail-back model allows people to place unwanted medications in prepaid envelopes and mail them to participating vendors for disposal.

SMDP’s collaborative partnership includes environmentally invested groups such as Zero Waste Sonoma and the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA).

The project is “a high-priority” for RRWA’s board of directors in particular, as “it’s comprised of elected officials from all the cities in the county,” says RRWA executive director Andy Rodgers. “They know their constituents want to have a safe, convenient way to dispose of their unwanted medications.”

“There’s a lot of support for our programs and definitely a need for more bins,” Steinman says.

SMDP will transition into a comprehensive statewide take-back program in the near future, Steinman says.


FIGHT THE OPIOID CRISIS

128 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose, says the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

45% of drug overdoses are estimated to be opioid-related. In California, that’s more than 2,400 deaths each year.

Millions of Americans are addicted to opioids, such as hydrocodone, morphine, and oxycodone. Abuse of these powerful painkillers takes a toll that goes far beyond individuals and their families.

$78.5 billion represents the annual economic burden of opioid abuse, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This includes health care, treatment, law enforcement, and lost productivity.

Many people who misuse opioids get them from a friend or relative — often without that person’s knowledge. By removing the risk of unused opioids in your home, you can help address the devastating opioid crisis affecting so many American families.

Proper disposal of unused prescription opioids saves lives.
KEY TO SUCCESS: SIMPLE, SAFE, CONVENIENT

Commonly asked questions about pharmaceutical take-back bins

BY ANNE STOKES

Medication take-back bins provide a safe and responsible way to dispose of unused and expired medications. This secure disposal option keeps medications from polluting local watersheds and can help prevent both intentional misuse and accidental poisonings.

The bins are a simple and safe solution to a common problem. “They are convenient for residents to dispose of medicine,” says Jennifer Lombari, general manager of Mendo Recycle. “Having accessible bins promotes proper disposal rather than putting them in the waste stream or being flushed down the toilet.”

Here are more answers to frequently asked questions about take-back bins:

What can be disposed of in the bins?
Bins accept prescription and over-the-counter medications, medical patches, as well as pet medications and medicated ointments and lotions tightly sealed in their original containers. Disposal requirements are posted at each bin location.

What materials cannot be disposed of in the bins?
Illegal controlled substances such as marijuana, heroin or LSD for example, cannot be disposed of in the bins. For safety reasons, medical sharps and needles, compressed cylinders such as asthma inhalers, chemotherapy or radiopharmaceuticals should also not be disposed of in bins. Medical devices such as thermometers also cannot be disposed of in the bins. Sites will not be held responsible for materials deposited into bins.

What locations are suitable to host a take-back bin?
Pharmacies, hospitals with pharmacies, and law enforcement locations are suitable locations as they can provide proper management and security for materials.

What are sites responsible for handling?
Sites are responsible for maintaining bins and ensuring they are securely located inside. Once full, sites are responsible for scheduling material pick-ups. They also are responsible for answering questions from customers about what materials may be dropped in the bins. Once the bin is full, site staff is responsible for removing and sealing the package and liner for pick up.

Host sites may also be responsible for a monthly service fee for the collection and proper disposal of materials. Although costs may vary depending on a number of factors, the value of the ongoing servicing is approximately $165 a month.

Is there any assistance available for host sites?
The California Product Stewardship Council is available for technical assistance, including initial bin set-up and getting configured in the system for scheduling material pick-ups.

For more information, visit www.takebackdrugs.org.

For more information on what types of medications can be accepted and for take-back bin locations, visit www.takebackdrugs.org.
HOW YOU CAN HELP

WHERE TO FIND A MEDICATION TAKE-BACK BIN?

Many independent pharmacies, hospital pharmacies, and chain pharmacies now include medication take-back bins. Other non-medical facilities, such as law enforcement offices, also offer medication take-back bins for the public to use.

To find the nearest bin to where you live, use this interactive map at:

www.takebackdrugs.org

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Follow these easy steps:

1. At home, if possible, remove pills and other solid medications from their containers and consolidate in a clear plastic zipper bag. Keep cream medication tightly sealed in their original containers. (NOTE: Keep medications in their child-proof container until just prior to drop off.)

2. Remove, mark out, or otherwise obscure personal information from solid and cream medication containers to protect your personal information. Recycle containers for solid medications in your household recycling, if applicable. See your local waste and recycling services provider’s website.

3. Bring zipper bag and any creams to a bin location and place in the bin. It’s that easy!

QUESTIONS?

www.takebackdrugs.org  info@calpsc.org  916.706.3420

WHY MEDICATION TAKE-BACK BINS WORK

“These take-back bins are a safe and convenient way for people to dispose of their unused medications, which will help fight prescription drug abuse and keep pharmaceuticals out of our water supply. It’s a win for public health, the environment, and consumers. As the author of SB 212, which created the first in the nation statewide drug and needle take-back program funded by the producers of these products, I am thrilled that millions of Californians throughout the state will be able to easily dispose of their unused medications.”

Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson
Santa Barbara

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Tedd Ward
Director, Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority

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