



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – January 2016 Safe Medicine Disposal Update

It's a question that we have all found ourselves asking at one point or another: what do I do with my old prescription and over the counter medicines? Proper disposal of medicines has been a long standing issue where, for many years, the public was directed to throw old medicines away in their trash or flush them down the toilet. However, studies have shown that these two disposal methods, although easy and very convenient, are also not environmentally appropriate. Statistics are also telling us there are real problems with prescription medicine abuse – including accidental poisonings - among all segments of our population, fueled in large part by availability of surplus medicines from family members or friends.

The regional partners that comprise RRWA membership, from both Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, have enacted a free Safe Medicine Disposal program to take back old, unused, unneeded, expired, or otherwise no longer desired medicines. In Mendocino County, Ukiah has 3 take-back locations, Willits and Fort Bragg each have one, and the Mendocino Solid Waste Management Authority operates a HazMobile collection program. In Sonoma County, there is at least one take back location in the Cities of Cotati, Cloverdale, Healdsburg, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Sonoma, and the Town of Windsor. There are additional locations in unincorporated areas of the County. The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency also collects unwanted medicines at its Household Toxics Facility at the Central Disposal Site, via weekly Community Toxic Collection (CTC) events held all over Sonoma County, and through the Toxic Rover household pick-up service. More than twenty secure mailbox-like bins are located in pharmacies and police departments throughout the two counties to keep unused medications out of the wrong hands and the environment. To find the closest drop off location near you, please visit www.safemedicinedisposal.org/drop-off-locations

The Safe Medicine Disposal program provides a means for proper disposal of unwanted medicines. Currently, there are a limited number of take-back locations, in part, because the cost of running the program is borne by the local government. Since 2008, the program has safely transported more than 90,000 pounds of collected medications to a certified disposal facility, but the cost of collection, hauling, and disposal is high.

Recently, nearby counties have developed Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) ordinances which shift the burden of medicine disposal to medicine manufacturers and distributors.

One of the pioneer Extended Producer Responsibility programs was developed by Alameda County and recently passed the ultimate legal test. The United States Supreme Court chose to allow a decision by the 9th Circuit Federal Court of Appeals in favor of the Alameda ordinance to stand against legal challenges and establish a comprehensive take-back program. The responsibility and expense for medicine take-back programs in Alameda is now placed with medicine manufacturers and distributors, thus putting the burden of disposal back to the parties that profit from the medicines' sale.

Mendocino and Sonoma County leaders are discussing establishing an ordinance for medicine disposal similar to Alameda County's. Recently, Andy Rodgers (RRWA Executive Director) and Mark Landman, Cotati City Council Member and RRWA Chair, visited all the local municipality governing bodies to explain Safe Medicine Disposal and discuss the opportunity to develop an extended producer responsibility ordinance. Eight cities in



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Sonoma County have signed letters of support to evaluate the feasibility of extending responsibility of medicine disposal in Sonoma County to medicine producers and manufacturers.

Who do you think should pay for the safe disposal of medicines? What do you currently do with your unwanted medications? Tell us at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SonomaMedsSharps>

This article was authored by Henry Mikus of the City of Sebastopol on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.