



Protecting Our Children & Our Families: How Medicine Return Programs Can Collect Legally Prescribed Controlled Substances

Controlled substances make up approximately 11% of all prescription medicines and are important medicines to collect and dispose of properly to reduce drug diversion and accidental poisonings. Examples of controlled prescription drugs are Vicodin, oxycodone, morphine, Ritalin, Valium, and cough medicines containing codeine. Abuse of prescription drugs is a rapidly growing problem in our communities, especially among teenagers. One third of all new abusers of prescription drugs were 12- to 17-year olds in 2005. Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration shows that most abusers get these drugs from a friend or relative for free. Our medicine cabinets are taking the place of drug dealers.

The consequences of prescription drug abuse are serious. Emergency departments in Washington State report that 3,529 visits in 2006 were caused by prescription medications (opiates). 54% of these were due to drug abuse.

Controlled Substances Can Be Collected Under Existing Laws:

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) strictly regulates the distribution and possession of controlled substances. Currently under the Controlled Substances Act and DEA regulations, leftover controlled substances can only be collected by law enforcement personnel or by the DEA.

Medicine return programs in Washington and around the country are using the following legal mechanisms to collect controlled substances:

- **Drop-off locations at police stations.** Programs in Clark County, WA; Sammamish, WA; Snohomish County, WA (beginning in fall '09); San Mateo County, CA, Chicago, IL, and other locations are using this approach. Many police and sheriff's offices want to provide this critical community service, but a sustainable source of funding is needed.
- **Mail-back envelopes that are mailed to law enforcement officials.** In a pilot program in Maine, consumers are returning controlled substances and other medicines in a mailer envelope to a U.S. Post Office Box. Two law enforcement officers pick up the mailers, then safely dispose of the medicines. Many people receive their prescription medicines through the mail, so a mail-back return program can be convenient.

Proposals in Congress to Amend the Controlled Substances Act:

While current legal options for returning controlled substances work, they are less convenient or more costly than other return mechanisms. For example, it would be both convenient and inexpensive for residents to return all unwanted medicines to secure drop boxes in participating pharmacies. High demand for convenient and cost-effective medicine return programs has led to proposals to amend the federal Controlled Substances Act to allow for more options to collect controlled substances. Two bills are currently being considered by the House Judiciary Committee: the Safe Drug Disposal Act of 2009 (H.R. 1191/S. 1336) sponsored by Representative Jay Inslee and Senator Patty Murray and the Secure and Reliable Drug Disposal Act (H.R. 1359/S. 1292) sponsored by Representative Bart Stupak and Senator Amy Klobuchar.

Sources of Prescription Drug Abuse Information:

Prescription for Danger: A Report on the Troubling Trend of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse Among the Nation's Teens", Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, January, 2008. Available online at: http://www.theantidrug.com/pdfs/prescription_report.pdf, accessed 11/20/08.
Banta-Green, C, *et al.* (2007). The Use & Abuse of Prescription-Type Opiates in Washington State, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington. Available online at http://depts.washington.edu/adai/pubs/arb/PrescriptionOpiates_March30_2007.pdf
Office of National Drug Control Policy web site > Drug Facts > Prescription Drugs http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/prescriptn_drugs/index.html

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