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More Vermonters Turning in Unused and Unwanted Prescription Drugs

Take Back Day is October 28 – and every day

BURLINGTON – In just the past three months, the Lamoille County Sheriff’s Department has collected nearly two tons of unused and unwanted prescription and other medications stored at sheriff offices around the state, as part of a new effort to get rid of unused drugs. State officials are encouraging Vermonters to safely – and anonymously – turn in their own unused, expired or unwanted medications this Saturday, October 28, when communities around the state will have collection locations as part of the nationwide Prescription Drug Take Back Day.

Find a drop off location at healthvermont.gov/drugtakeback or dial 2-1-1.

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day is held twice a year to help people safely dispose of the drugs they no longer need, and reduce the risk that the drugs may be misused. This past April, 5,553 tons of medication were collected in Vermont. Building on this, Vermont has moved to establish year-round, permanent take-back sites around the state, and is testing innovative programs such as the Law Enforcement Drug Disposal Pilot Program through a grant to the Lamoille County Sheriff’s Office.

“Recent studies indicate that between 42 percent and 71 percent of opioids prescribed in connection with surgical procedures go unused. These are opioids that may be diverted for non-medical use,” said Vermont’s Public Safety Commissioner Tom Anderson. “Removing these dangerous and addictive drugs from the home is key to addressing the opioid crisis we face in our communities.”

Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD agrees. “Unfortunately, so many people who misuse painkillers start with what they find in the medicine cabinet at home,” said Dr. Levine. “We know drug misuse that starts this way can lead to more addictive, and sometime fatal drug use.

That’s why we want everyone to help get rid of what we call Vermont’s Most Dangerous Leftovers.”

The Law Enforcement Drug Disposal Pilot Program, funded by a grant from the Health Department, aims to reduce barriers for local law enforcement agencies to participate in drug disposal. Lamoille County Sheriff Roger Marcoux, who leads the program, said the pilot effort is hitting it out of the park. Sheriff Marcoux and his deputies have divided the state into quadrants, and make monthly pick-up rounds of collected medications stored at the 13 other sheriff departments.

“We’re only three months in, and this is already a success story of administration leadership, legislative direction, and collaboration between state and local agencies,” Sheriff Marcoux said. “We are building an accountable, efficient system for drug disposal that frees up limited space in evidence lockers used to store the drugs, decreases staff and resource pressure, and by regularly removing medications for disposal, we are reducing the risk of diversion.” The medications will be turned over to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) for disposal.

In addition to taking the drugs out of circulation, Marcoux anticipates working with Health officials and the DEA to better understand what makes up all the drugs collected. “How much are opioids versus medications like chemotherapy drugs that are no longer needed? Knowing what the drugs were for will help inform the public and prescriber education and outreach.”

Marcoux said the pilot project is a jumping off point for future coordinated efforts and, he hopes, an ongoing program once the pilot’s effectiveness is reviewed. “Safe drug disposal should be made as easy as possible. I’d like to see wrap-around services in cooperation with the Health Department, such as drop-off kiosks at all local departments, to help raise public awareness and tie in to the tremendous opioid misuse prevention efforts already in place.”

Learn more about the safe use, safe storage and safe disposal of prescription drugs, and watch Governor Scott’s message encouraging Vermonters to dispose of drugs properly on Take Back Day and throughout the year at healthvermont.gov/drugtakeback.

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