

## Groups to take back Rx drugs

Adams, York police departments, pharmacies join nationwide event.

By KATHARINE HARMON The Evening Sun

Posted: 09/10/2010 01:00:00 AM EDT

[http://www.eveningsun.com/ci\\_16034147](http://www.eveningsun.com/ci_16034147)

For years, people were told simply to flush unwanted prescription medications down the toilet.

Keeping those unused prescriptions around the house could lead to misuse and abuse, which is a major concern to local and national law enforcement.

But now there's heightened awareness of flushed medication going into wastewater plants, out into streams and rivers and being recycled back into drinking water. And any wastewater sludge that's used to fertilize farms could potentially put drugs right back into local products.

"We're drugging and poisoning ourselves," said Bicky Redman, director of the Adams County Department of Environmental Services.

On a national level, prescription drugs have been found to be an "emerging contaminant," and that could be the case locally, too, though officials usually lack the resources to test smaller waterways, said Gary Peacock, York County specialist for the Watershed Alliance

"The primary concern from my standpoint is water quality," Peacock said. "Most York-Adams area water is derived from surface area."

Statistically, Redman added, only about 10 percent of medication is metabolized in someone's body, and when drugs contaminate wastewater sludge, it can be at levels of up to 90 percent.

As the federal Environmental Protection Agency looks into the issue, the severity of the situation grows every month, Peacock added.

In the meantime, if everyone stopped flushing their prescriptions, Peacock said it could eliminate the entire issue.

It's about awareness and education, which Peacock called the "most powerful and effective tool."

But it's not as simple as tossing drugs in the trash, said Jeff Holdren, who works at the East Berlin Pharmacy.

In York County, garbage goes to an incinerator, which would destroy the drugs, but in Adams County, it goes to a landfill, Holdren said. And even if the drugs are still in their bottle, they can seep into the ground.

And not all prescriptions can be brought to your local pharmacy for disposal -- a service East Berlin Pharmacy offers -- because pharmacists can't legally accept narcotics, Holdren said.

Right now, Holdren said he tells concerned patients to put their medication in kitty litter or coffee grounds to make it inert. Then seal it in a container and put it in the trash.

But the easiest solution in his eyes is either allow pharmacists to collect narcotics, or have more local law enforcement hosting medicine "take-back" events.

And the latter is what's occurring across Adams and York counties and the country, Saturday, Sept. 25.

The Drug Enforcement Administration announced the nationwide initiative to address the rates of prescription-drug abuse, which they say are "increasing at alarming rates."

Studies show that nearly 70 percent of people who abuse prescription pain relievers get them from friends or family, and that the rates of abuse are increasing because people assume if it's prescribed by a doctor, it's safe to use.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that prescription drugs are responsible for more overdose deaths than "street drugs" like cocaine, heroin and amphetamines. They also are the drug of choice among 12- and 13-year-olds, according to a 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

"Working together with our state and local partners, the medical community, anti-drug coalitions, and a concerned public, we will eliminate a major source of abused prescription drugs and reduce the hazard they pose to our families and communities in a safe, legal and environmentally sound way," said Michele M. Leonhart, acting administrator for the DEA.

In Hanover, The Awareness Group of Hanover coordinated the take-back event at Giant, on Baltimore Street, where local law enforcement will be on hand to take narcotics into custody.

The events across Adams County are sponsored by the state DEA, local police departments who will be on hand, Collaborating For Youth, Adams County Department of Environmental Services and Potomac River Basin Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership.

[kharmon@eveningsun.com](mailto:kharmon@eveningsun.com)

**IF YOU GO**

Bring your unwanted prescription medication or over-the-counter medication to be properly disposed of during the nationwide prescription drug take-back day. The following locations are holding prescription drug "take back" events from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 25:

Giant Pharmacy, 801 Baltimore St., Hanover

Adams County Agricultural Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, Gettysburg

Alpha Fire Co. No. 1, 40 E. King St., Littlestown

Bermudian Springs School District, 7335 Carlisle Pike, York Springs

Biglerville High School, 161 N. Main St., Biglerville

United Hook & Ladder Fire Co. No. 33, 21 N. Bolton St., New Oxford

Fairfield Fire Department, 108 Steelman St., Fairfield

For more information, contact Collaborating for Youth at (717) 338-0300 extension 26 or e-mail [drugfree@cfygettysburg.com](mailto:drugfree@cfygettysburg.com).

Online drug prevention resources and information are available at [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org).