



SECURE MEDICINE RETURN FOR WASHINGTON



Unwanted Medicines in Our Homes Increase Risks of Poisoning, Abuse, and Improper Disposal

Medicines save lives and treat illnesses. But expired or left-over drugs need to be handled safely and disposed of properly to prevent harm to people and our environment.

Storing unneeded drugs in our medicine cabinets increases risk of accidental poisonings and increases opportunities for illegitimate access and drug abuse. Unwanted medicines that are flushed down toilets into septic systems or wastewater treatment facilities can end up in our surface or ground waters, potentially impacting aquatic organisms. Trash disposal is not secure, especially for narcotics like OxyContin, and does not guarantee medicines won't get into the environment.

Community demand for a safe and secure way to dispose of medicines is high. Group Health Cooperative and select Bartell Drugs locations have collected more than 27,000 pounds of unwanted medicines in their original containers since October 2006, with limited locations and little advertising. By partnering with law enforcement, medicine return programs can also collect and destroy legally prescribed controlled substances, like OxyContin and Ritalin. See www.medicinereturn.com.

The Solution: A Secure Medicine Return Program for Washington

The Secure Medicine Return Bill, sponsored by Representative Dawn Morrell and Senator Adam Kline, will create a producer-provided medicine return program that is convenient, safe and secure for residents throughout the state. Over-the-counter medicines and prescription drugs, including controlled substances, will be securely collected and safely disposed to help reduce access to drugs, reduce risks of poisonings, and reduce environmental contamination.

In 2009, the Secure Medicine Return bill (2SHB 1165) was passed through three committees in the House, but the clock ran out before a floor vote could be held. Representative Morrell plans to reintroduce the bill in the 2010 legislative session.

The Secure Medicine Return bill is a shared responsibility approach:

- **Producer-Provided Program:** Producers of prescription and over-the-counter medications will have the flexibility to use their expertise to create the best and most cost-effective program. The bill sets minimum program requirements, but does not mandate specific collection methods. Producers may work together to create a program or may create a program on their own. Drug producers will pay for collection, transportation and disposal. Manufacturers of medicines have more than ten years of experience providing and paying for a medicine return program in British Columbia and are operating similar programs in other countries, including Italy, Spain, and France.
- **State Government Oversight:** The Board of Pharmacy will review, approve, and monitor the take-back program, with consultation from the Department of Ecology. Agency staffing for the program will be minimal, but will provide essential oversight. The bill is budget neutral to the state and does not require any general account funds.
- **Voluntary Pharmacy or Law Enforcement Involvement:** Medicine producers may arrange for secure collection sites in law enforcement offices, pharmacies, or other locations; however police, sheriffs, retailers and others can choose to participate or not. Existing programs at some pharmacies and law enforcement offices in Washington demonstrate strong community interest and demand for drug take-back programs.



This photo shows the amount of medicines collected every day from only 25 Group Health pharmacies across the state.

We know that medicines that are safely collected and disposed won't:

- Cause an accidental poisoning death, or
- Be used illicitly by a teenager, or
- Contaminate our environment