

Tribune

Bill Requires Drug Companies to Pay for Safe, Secure Drug Disposal

By Jessica Sparks

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By JESSICA SPARKS

Supporters of a bill that would require pharmaceutical companies to cover the cost of a statewide prescription pill drop off program fear it may die under the weight of pressure from the pharmaceutical lobby and the ongoing budget crisis.

The Secure Medicine Return Bill, SB 5234, would be the first in the country that requires a statewide prescription drug take back program funded by pharmaceutical companies at a scant amount of the cost compared to their annual sales in Washington state.

The bill requires pharma-

ceutical companies to set up a statewide program that would allow people to safely dispose their unused prescription pills. The bill caps the cost to pharmaceutical companies at \$2.5 million a year, which equals about a couple of pennies per prescription sold in the state. In Washington, pharmaceutical sales total more than \$4 billion, said Margaret Shield, a spokeswoman for Take Back Your Meds, a coalition made up of more than 240 law enforcement agencies, health districts, drug stores, environmental groups and local governments.

"We are asking them to include it in their cost of doing

business," Shield said.

The bill last year failed by one vote in the Senate, which is where supporters are directing their lobbying efforts this legislative session. Shield says the group hopes to get the bill out of the Senate Rules Committee for a floor vote.

People in the state need a safe way to dispose of their medicines because 30 percent of drugs sold in the state go unused, Shield said.

In reaction to drug overdoses overtaking car accidents as the leading cause of accidental

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deaths in Washington state and the growing prescription drug abuse among young people, Snohomish County set up a secure system for people to drop off their unused medicine. The drop off locations also helps the environment by keeping prescription drugs out of sewer systems and polluting the state's waters.

People in Snohomish County can drop off their medicines at local police stations and at 14 pharmacies, such as participating Bartells, and Group Health clinics. The program is being funded by the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office and Snohomish Health District, but money to sustain the program isn't secure.

Snohomish County's program could serve as the model program for pharmaceutical companies, Shield said. In the first year of collection in 2010, the county collected 3,096 pounds of pills. January through October 2011, the program collected 3,944 pounds of pills.

The sheriff's office collects the pills from the drop off locations and takes them to a high temperature incineration facility, which at this time is the safest method for getting rid of pills, Shield said.

She said secure drop off locations are working and has broad support from a variety of groups and all levels of government.