

## **Health district supports second run at drug take back bill**

By JJ Swanson  
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Many homes have unused prescription medications lying around and according to the Kitsap Public Health District, there is no safe disposal system in the county.

County law enforcement says its resources are "strained" by the collection and disposal of prescription narcotics. The health district believes that pharmaceutical companies should take on the cost burden.

The health district's board of directors and the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office are supporting Senate Bill 5234 to establish a safe drug collection and disposal program funded by the drug manufacturers themselves.

If passed, the bill will require pharmaceutical companies that sell drugs in Washington state to create drop-off locations for unused medication in each county as well as all cities with a population of 10,000 or more. The companies would also have to pay for education programs, drug disposal monitoring and disposal fees. Operational costs would be capped at \$2.5 million per year.

"Only programs operated by law enforcement can collect controlled substances," said Scott Daniels, deputy director for Kitsap Public Health District. "However, local funding for these programs does not allow for adequate promotion and is drying up."

Daniels explained that unused prescription medications around the home are responsible for 32 percent of child poisoning deaths in the state. Prescription medications left in homes, especially pain medications, contribute to teenage drug abuse and street sales as well as home burglaries, according to deputy Scott Wilson, spokesman for the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office

"The pharmaceutical companies are opposing us across the country," said Terri Thomas, an advocate for Take Back Your Meds in Kitsap County. "But the program would cost them about 2 cents per \$30 prescription. They can afford it."

The bill failed in the 2011 state legislative session because it did not have enough support for a senate floor hearing. This year, the bill has gone to senate rules committee but is still one senator short.

"The bill's moving [this year]," Daniels said. "We're in the batting circle now."

More than 396 pounds of unused prescription medications were returned by Kitsap County residents at a medicine take back event hosted at the Kitsap Mall by the Sheriff's Office in October.

Though the event was considered a "success," organizers still want a day-to-day infrastructure for returning unused medication.

"We generally don't do a lot of advertising that people should take their medications there because we don't want to overwhelm law enforcement. But it's the only place for people to get rid of their medications in the county, so it's a catch-22," Thomas said.

Thomas explained that she has a personal connection with prescription medications in the home. Her college-aged daughter found OxyContin, a prescription painkiller, that Thomas had left over from a surgery and began abusing the medication and dealing to her friends.

Her daughter has been "in and out" of drug rehabilitation centers and was addicted to heroin, Thomas.

"I didn't put them in the trash or flush them because I know the environmental issues with drugs getting into the water," Thomas said. "We didn't have little kids anymore, so they weren't locked up. The sad part is, this is not an uncommon story here."

Thomas explained the burden that her daughter's prescription medication abuse has had on the community. She pointed to law enforcement resources, court time, the state-run rehabilitation facility her daughter checked into and multiple emergency room hospitalizations as examples of how one prescription drug abuse impacts community resources.

"If you're advocating for smaller government, look at all the government money we're actually wasting now," Thomas said.

Daniels said that some people still choose to dispose of drugs down the drain and that this is also a public health concern in the county. A 2011 World Health Organization report revealed "excess drugs down toilets and sinks" were beginning to show up in city water supplies and that pills thrown into the trash were entering wastewater treatment plants as landfill leachate and not being filtered out.

"Washington is ground zero," Thomas said. "If legislation passes here, drug manufacturers will have to pay for these safe take-back programs as the cost of doing business. They'll be concerned about the other 49 states."

Washington Biotechnology and Biomedical Association and Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, two drug manufacturers who opposed the bill in last year's legislative session could not be reached for comment.

The session closes in two weeks, and Kitsap County officials are still trying to get more support for the bill. For more information go to [takebackyourmeds.org](http://takebackyourmeds.org).

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