

# Survey of Law Enforcement Medicine Return Locations in King County

## Highlights

As of October 2010, six law enforcement offices in King County provide drop-off programs where citizens can return their unwanted medicines. Front desk staff and Chiefs in these offices were interviewed in October 2010 by staff from the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County to see how these programs were working.

### **Factors motivating Chiefs to start a medicine take-back program.**

- requests from a civic group,
- request from the mayor's office,
- home burglaries that targeted prescription drugs,
- a request from a family that had lost a loved one to a prescription drug overdose, and
- 3 chiefs referred to their awareness of prescription drug abuse in their local schools.

### **Feedback on medicine take-back program success.**

Without exception, participating offices reported positive responses from their citizens and communities.

- Chiefs or staff at all six sites would encourage other law enforcement offices to begin a return program.
- Chiefs and staff offered positive comments, such as
  - "There's definitely a need,"
  - "It's been running smoothly - very, very easy," and
  - "I think it's great."
- One office reported that the principal of the local high school was very happy about the program.
- One office reported that their citizens say "Thank you so much."

### **Number of citizens that use the program each week.**

Reported numbers range from "1 or 2" up to "6 or 8." The average was 3.8 citizens per week.

### **Amount of time the office spent on the take-back program per week.**

Average time = 41 minutes per week. The range was 15 minutes to "less than 2 hours."

### **Pounds of unwanted medicine collected for disposal.**

- Between January 2009 and October 2010, these six King County sites collected approximately 770 pounds of medicines through their take-back programs.
- Additionally, four participating sites collected 439 pounds of medications as part of the DEA's National Pharmaceutical Take-Back Day on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

### **Data collected in the management of the return program.**

- Most surveyed offices only track collected material by number of boxes and pounds.
- Most locations do not require or record any information from citizens that bring in unwanted medicines. One location collects the participating citizens' ZIP codes.

### **Challenges in setting up or implementing the programs.**

Some respondents said there were no particular issues. Others mentioned logistical issues such as:

- writing the operational protocols
- scheduling of the two staff members that are required to change out a full collection bin
- storage space in the evidence room
- disposal logistics for the collected material
- managing frequent change-outs of full boxes at the busiest site.

### **Start-up and operational costs.**

Costs of medicine take-back programs typically entail costs of collection, transportation, disposal, and program promotion.

- Secure metal collection bins used at most sites cost about \$700 per unit. One office constructed its own bin and several sites got their bins through the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program or other county funds.
- Most law enforcement sites are disposing of collected household medicines along with their evidentiary drugs. Because these programs were not paying directly for transportation and disposal, the operational costs were described as “minimal.” Two offices took advantage of free one-time disposal by DEA as part of the National Take-Back Day. Another location transfers collected material to a Snohomish County facility for high temperature incineration at a permitted solid waste incinerator. Incineration of collected medicines at permitted high temperature incinerators, typically costs law enforcement about \$165 per ton, plus the expenses associated with transporting materials to the incinerator.

*Complete survey results available online at <http://www.takebackyourmeds.org/news-and-resources/resources>*

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