



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

What To Do With Those Old Prescriptions

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What has four legs, stands outside District Court, and takes any drug offered? It's the **new prescription medication drop box**. This is a secure box for the safe disposal of expired or left-over prescriptions including controlled substances (narcotics). County hazardous waste specialists installed the box, which is just outside the entrance to Building Three at the main Thurston County courthouse campus, at 2000 Lakeridge Dr. SW in Olympia.

Properly disposing of unused or outdated prescription medications accomplishes a couple of worthy goals. One of the main goals is to keep such drugs out of the hands of abusers. According to a state survey, three in five teens said prescription pain killers were easy to obtain from parent's medicine cabinets. Proper disposal takes away that threat.

Another goal is to keep medications from getting into the environment. While it may seem like a safe option to flush old drugs down the toilet, that is not the best way to dispose of them. Septic systems and sewer treatment plants are not set up to handle drugs, so they wind up in our ground water and surface water.

Group Health Cooperative also sponsors medicine disposal bins at 25 clinics around the state, including one in Olympia on Lilly Road. This bin is set up near their pharmacy and is open to the public. The Olympia Group Health bin has been the busiest of all their sites; it collected 16% of the total volume of material collected in 2009. This location was twice as busy as the next busiest Group Health bin – which is all the more reason to appreciate that we now have at least one other bin serving Thurston County.

Note that the Group Health medicine return bin, however, cannot be used to dispose of controlled substances - narcotics such as OxyContin, Ritalin and Vicodin – because the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration only allows law enforcement to handle those drugs. The new facility outside the Sheriff's office overcomes this obstacle and provides a safe, legal means for disposing of all drugs. The Sheriff's office disposes of the medications the same way they dispose of illegal drugs that are confiscated when they make a drug bust.

Currently the costs for the new disposal bin are borne by the Sheriff's office, the Department of Ecology, and the County. In the future the hope is that a product stewardship system can be established so that costs are shared by manufacturers, which would make it possible to offer safe and convenient medicine disposal services in more locations throughout Thurston County and across the state.

At a time when drug overdoses have surpassed car wrecks as the leading cause of accidental deaths in Washington State, safe disposal of controlled substances via secure drop boxes is an important way to keep such drugs out of the hands of abusers.

For more information, see www.WhereDoITakeMy.org and look under “Medications.”

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