

RRWA: Safe medicine disposal program update for Mendocino and Sonoma counties

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How do you dispose of your old prescription and over the counter medicines? Not only are there environmental concerns associated with throwing medicine in the trash and flushing them down the toilet, letting them accumulate at home creates opportunities for those medicines to get into the wrong hands. For these reasons, the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA) enacted the free Safe Medicine Disposal Program to safely take back and properly dispose of unwanted medicines.

The Safe Medicine Disposal Program is a partnership between local agencies, pharmacies and law enforcement offices to safely dispose of unwanted medications, prevent overdoses, and protect the environment. Residents of Sonoma and Mendocino counties can drop off their unwanted medications at free, discreet, and anonymous medicine take-back locations. These locations accept prescription and over-the-counter pills and capsules, liquid medications, veterinary medications, vitamins, supplements, homeopathic remedies, medical patches, inhalers, and medical samples.

Since 2007, the Safe Medicine Disposal Program has collected over 142,100 pounds of unwanted medicines. For more information on the Safe Medicine Disposal Program locations, visit www.rrwatershed.org/project/safe-medicine-disposal.

In addition to the Safe Medicine Disposal Program, Sonoma and Mendocino county residents can use the following free medication disposal programs:

The California Drug Take-Back Program is funded by California Department of Health Care Services' MAT Expansion Project and developed and administered in partnership with the California Product Stewardship Council. www.takebackdrugs.org

National Prescription Drug Take Back Days: Dispose of medications, including controlled substances, at special one-day collection events sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The next event is Oct. 23, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback

Syringes and needles (also known as sharps) have fewer drop-off locations due to safety and regulatory concerns and are not accepted at many of the Safe Medicine Disposal drop-off locations. State law makes it illegal to dispose of sharps in the trash or recycling containers and requires that all sharps waste be transported to a collection center in an FDA-approved sharps container. Please refer to the provided list of certified sharps and needles disposal locations within Sonoma County and Mendocino County to properly dispose of the collected sharps found at www.rrwatershed.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/How-to-Dispose-of-Sharps.pdf. Contact your local household hazardous waste facility, local law enforcement agency, public works, or parks department should you need further assistance disposing of sharps.

More sharps disposal information can be found on these websites:

Sonoma County: <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/materials/sharps-needles>

Mendocino

County: www.mendocinocounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/36679/637299854124330000

More options for safe and convenient medication and sharps disposal will be available in 2022 with the implementation of Senate Bill (SB) 212 (Jackson, Chapter 1004, Statutes of 2018). This law is an extended producer responsibility (EPR) law, requiring that pharmaceutical manufacturers manage their products' waste at end-of-life. To comply with this law, pharmaceutical manufacturers and others in the product chain will design, manage and fund take-back programs to securely collect unwanted medicines and sharps waste from the public and ensure the collected materials are properly managed. More information can be found here: <https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/epr/pharmasharps>. Stay tuned for updates from RRWA on this new statewide program.

This article was authored by the RRWA Safe Medicine Disposal Subcommittee – Operations Group, on behalf of RRWA. RRWA is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water,

habitat restoration, and watershed enhancement.