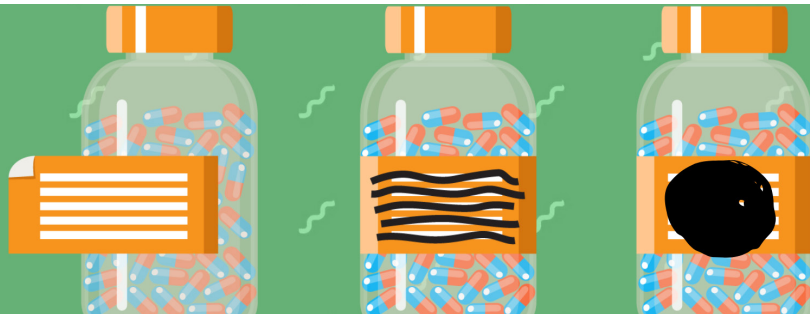


EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DISPOSING OF UNWANTED MEDICATION

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INNOVATIVE PROGRAM HELPS OPIOID CRISIS AND ENVIRONMENT, TOO

by
Debbie
Arrington

Safe disposal drug take-back bins help to combat opioid crisis and keep dangerous drugs out of environment, waterways

Solving problems; that's what government does. And if a program can create solutions to multiple issues, so much the better.

That's the result of an innovative safe disposal drug take-back bin program that allows California residents to dispose of unwanted, unneeded, or expired drugs at convenient locations for free. These take-back bins not only allow consumers to dispose of drugs safely, but they get those drugs out of circulation—away from children or potential abusers.

If flushed down the toilet, those dangerous drugs also can pollute the community water supply, presenting further problems. Instead, drugs collected from the take-back bins are burned at waste-to-energy facilities to produce renewable energy—another plus.

"Unwanted medications pose significant problems for California primarily due to their potential for abuse and environmental harm."

Ann Carroll, Spokesperson, California Department of Health Care Services

"Unwanted medications pose significant problems for California, primarily due to their potential for abuse and environmental harm," says Ann Carroll, spokesperson for California's Department of Health Care Services (DHCS). "The accumulation of unused prescription drugs, particularly opioids, contributes to the opioid crisis. Unused medications left in homes can be misused or diverted for illegal purposes, exacerbating public health issues. Additionally, improper disposal of these drugs can contaminate soil and groundwater, posing environmental risks."

These convenient bins are a part of the California Statewide Drug Take-Back Program, which was funded by a \$3 million DHCS grant and—specifically—its Medication Assisted Treatment program aimed at combating the opioid crisis.

"The project aimed to address the opioid crisis by increasing prevention measures against misuse of prescription medications and expanding the options for the public to discard unwanted, unused, or outdated prescription drugs and other medications," Carroll explains.

That grant was a precursor to Senate Bill 212. Signed into law by then-Gov. Jerry Brown in 2018, SB 212 was the culmination of a years-long effort by the California Product Stewardship Council and its authors, State Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assem-



Wastewater treatment plants can't remove drugs and they contaminate our streams, rivers and lakes, which is harmful to animals, plants, and people.

bly members Phil Ting and Adam Gray.

"In 2021, CalRecycle established a stewardship program for the proper collection and disposal of pharmaceutical drug waste," Carroll says. "Under the stewardship program, a manufacturer or distributor of covered drugs or sharps [needles, syringes, etc.] is required to establish and implement a stewardship plan for covered drugs or for sharps."

This program works on multiple levels; people need to get rid of unwanted medications and communities need it done safely.

"The program raised awareness about the importance of ecologically sound medication disposal and informed them where they could find the installed bins," Carroll says. "Furthermore, by reducing access to unwanted household medicines, the program helped prevent drug abuse and accidental poisoning."

The first phase of the take-back bin program had an immediate impact.

"Nearly 250 bins were placed throughout California as part of this program, greatly expanding the network of bins across the state of California and providing all Californians access to free, safe medicine disposal," Carroll says. "Between the start of the program [Nov. 8, 2018] and March 31, 2021, 18,250 pounds of medications were collected or destroyed."

Since then, the number of bins has more than quadrupled. In 2023, California had 1,046 authorized collection sites with 882 located inside retail pharmacy locations, according to the 2024 annual report of the MED-Project. (MED stands for "medication education & disposal.")

"The program's goal was to increase access to and availability of medication take-

back services," says Carroll. "The project was designed to incorporate all services provided through onsite collection receptacles located in Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-approved locations, such as California-licensed pharmacies, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, or clinics with onsite pharmacies, and drug distributors [licensed wholesalers and third-party logistics providers registered with the DEA as collectors and licensed in good standing with the Board of Pharmacy.]"

More than 90% of Californians live within 15 miles of a take-back bin site, says the MED-project report. Additional locations are in the works. Residents in rural counties may send unwanted drugs to a disposal site via mail.

"The California Product Stewardship Council, in partnership with DHCS, purchased and distributed 100,000 medication mail-back envelopes, which allowed a consumer to return prescription medications to an authorized DEA destruction location," Carroll says.

An important part of the program is getting the word out so people know it's available. According to a recent survey, 26% of Californians say they've used take-back program options with another 61% intending to use the program.

Says Carroll, "The program educated community members about how to safely dispose of medications."

To find a bin, go to medtakebackcalifornia.org. Brought to you by the California Drug Take-Back Program and the California Product Stewardship Council

EASY AS 1-2-3

Safe disposal drug take-back bins: Safe, convenient, anonymous and good for the environment



Remove, mark out, or otherwise obscure personal information from all medication containers to protect your personal information.

Irresponsibly disposed medications can cause serious public safety concerns including addiction, can lead to unintentional misuse, and pollute watersheds.

Unwanted medications stockpiled in your medicine cabinet can be accidentally misused by young children who can overdose or can be intentionally abused by teens or adults, leading to addiction. Medications, particularly opioids, can be a tempting target for criminals who may attempt a break-in.

In the past, people were advised to mix unwanted medications with coffee grounds or kitty litter to make it undesirable should anyone try to illegally divert them and fish them out of the garbage can. However, drugs thrown in the trash, flushed down the drain, or washed down the sink can still end up in our landfills and waterways, harming wildlife, plant life, and polluting our drinking water.

Fortunately, there is an easy answer: Safe disposal drug take-back bins. These bins are safe, convenient and responsible disposal options for prescription and over-the-counter medications.

To find a bin, go to medtakeback-california.org. Brought to you by the California Drug Take-Back Program and the California Product Stewardship Council

How does it work? It's easy as 1-2-3

1. Keep medications in their child-proof container until just prior to drop off. Then remove pills and other solid medications from their containers and consolidate them in a clear plastic zipper bag. Keep medicated ointments and lotions tightly sealed in their original containers.
2. Remove, mark out, or otherwise obscure personal information from all medication containers to protect your personal information. Recycle solid medication containers in your household recycling.
3. Bring a zipper bag and any medicated ointments or lotions to a safe disposal drug take-back bin location and place in the bin – It's that easy!

Where do I find a bin?

Type in your address at the website medtakebackcalifornia.org.

What can I put in the bin?

- Prescription medications: Only certain locations accept Schedule II to V Controlled Substance medications. Please check the bin locations map for information about what types of medications each site can accept.
- Over-the-counter medications
- Medicated ointments and lotions: Leave tightly sealed in original containers.
- Pet medications
- Liquid prescriptions: Must be 6 oz. or less and in sealed bottles.

What can't I put in the bin?

- Illegal (Schedule I) Controlled Substances, for example: marijuana, heroin, LSD, etc.
- Medical Sharps and Needles: Hypodermic needles, syringes, auto injectors, infusion sets, connection needles/sets, and lancets.
- Auto-injectors, for example: EpiPen®.
- Iodine-containing medications
- Thermometers
- Radiopharmaceuticals
- Chemotherapy or cytotoxic medications
- Compressed cylinders or aerosols, for example: asthma inhalers. But: Check signage on the med bin and local rules of the disposal/incinerator operator as they may allow inhalers to be put into bins.
- Vitamins and dietary supplements
- Business medical waste such as: Company representative's product samples, waste from hospitals, clinics, and doctor's, dentist's, and veterinarian's practices.
- Liquid prescriptions (unless they are 6 oz. or less in a sealed bottle).

BURGLARS WANT YOUR MEDS

Take-back bins can keep medications out of the wrong hands



Storing unwanted meds at home may lead to accidental poisonings of young children or other family members. They may be taken by teens or visitors, which can lead to accidental overdoses

When a burglar breaks into a home, what's one of the first places they look? It's not the jewelry box — it's the medicine cabinet. Criminals may lift your TV and your diamonds, but they also snag your prescription drugs to be sold on the streets, introducing dangerous controlled substances into the community. And it's not just that burglars want your meds: Friends, family, and others in your home may find unwanted medication in your unlocked medicine cabinet as well.

"Kids are getting a hold of these medications, and that's a real problem. They are at a friend's house, or even their own home, and they look for places where medications are stored and they'll take some pills," says Sacramento County Sheriff Jim Cooper. "Teenagers can get addicted, they can overdose, they can go to a party and share it with friends or mix it with alcohol or other drugs and the consequences can be serious disability or even death."

"Take-back bins provide a convenient way to dispose of your unwanted or expired medications."

Sheriff Jim Cooper, Sacramento County Sheriff's Department

While residents can take unwanted drugs to law enforcement agencies, some people might not feel comfortable walking into a police station with a plastic bag full of pills. It's also illegal to possess a prescription drug

belonging to someone else, so when a loved one passes away, caretakers and family members are often left with no legal way to dispose of the drugs. Anonymous pharmaceutical take-back bins offer people an easy and responsible way to safely dispose of unwanted or expired medications, which are then incinerated at waste-to-renewable-energy plants. The take-back bin program

"Take-back bins provide a convenient way to dispose of your unwanted or expired medications."

**Sheriff Jim Cooper
Sacramento County Sheriff's Department**

targets the opioid crisis and the mishandling of other controlled and over-the-counter drugs. At its heart is a statewide network of bins placed in law-enforcement agencies, pharmacies and hospitals for public use.

"Take-back bins provide a convenient way to dispose of your unwanted or expired medications," says Sheriff Cooper. "There's so much medication out there, we want to

get it out of the community so that young people won't have an opportunity to find and abuse that medication."

Without the convenience and availability of medication take-back bins, disposal options are primarily limited to flushing them down the drain or throwing medications away in the trash. Both of those options risk polluting watersheds that provide municipal drinking water supplies. Considering it's not just that burglars want your meds, stockpiling medications at home until a community take-back event happens can increase the risk of misuse.

"A lot of people tell me that they didn't know what to do with their unwanted medications. But there are bins all around Sacramento County. I encourage everyone to use them to dispose of unwanted drugs," says Sheriff Cooper. "Dispose of your unwanted medications now, and you may prevent an overdose in the future."

To find a bin, go to medtakebackcalifornia.org. Brought to you by the California Drug Take-Back Program and the California Product Stewardship Council

KEEPING COMMUNITIES CLEAN, SAFE AND HEALTHY

Safe disposal drug take-back bins keep drugs from abuse and out of the environment

by Anne Stokes

In the right hands, medications can work wonders. When mishandled, they can be the stuff of nightmares, setting the stage for addiction and overdose deaths, increased crime rates, and even pollution that not only affects fish and wildlife, but gets into drinking water supplies.

Since 2018, California has implemented statewide programs to divert unused medications out of homes and the environment. Safe disposal drug take-back bins provide residents with safe and easily accessible options to ensure medications are not stockpiled in medicine cabinets, flushed down the drain, or left to languish in landfills. Commonly located in pharmacies, these bins make it easy for people to safely get rid of old medications the same time they pick up new ones.

“We urge everyone to ensure they properly dispose of their unused drugs at designated sites to enhance public safety,” says Sacramento County Health Officer Dr. Olivia Kasirye.

Intentional and unintentional misuse

Across the state in 2022, the California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard, prepared by California Department of Public Health, documented:

- 7,385 opioid-related overdose deaths
- 21,316 opioid overdose emergency room visits
- 13,640,794 opioid prescriptions

Unfortunately, these figures don't just reflect adults. A national study conducted from 2009 to 2020 found nearly 678,000 children under the age of five ended up in the emergency room due to unsupervised medication exposure. A majority—67.4%—involved children under the age of two. Adolescents and teens experienced an extreme jump in overdose deaths—94%—between 2019 and 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“One of our biggest problems is that kids are getting their hands on these medications. They go over to grandma and grandpa's house where there are lots of medications and they'll take some pills,” says Sgt. Brian Gunsolley with the Orange County Sheriff's Department. “That's really dangerous for teenagers: They can get addicted, they can overdose, they can go to a party and mix it with alcohol or other drugs and that can be fatal.”

During a drug take-back event in Orange County in October 2019, Gunsolley says that more than 3,000 pounds of medica-



Improperly disposed of medications can pollute the environment and harm wildlife. Wastewater treatment plants can't remove drugs, and the medications can end up in the watershed or agricultural irrigation.

tions were collected from 12 sheriff department-sponsored locations alone. While collecting more than 1.5 tons of pills is a good thing, stockpiling medications to wait for an annual event can be a recipe for misuse. Whether it's family, friends, or burglars, medicine cabinets can be a magnet for those looking to abuse medications or sell them on the black market.

Polluting watersheds

While most people know that anything flushed down the drain ends up at a water treatment plant, most aren't aware that the intricate processes involved in water cleaning aren't geared toward removing medications.

“We have treatment processes that take out organic matter and then use microbes to digest those compounds. It reduces the organic matter in the water to a point where we can discharge it back to the river or stream,” says Brandon Nakagawa, Water Resource Coordinator with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works. “Pharmaceuticals are something that our systems aren't necessarily designed to remove.”

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, pharmaceuticals are increasingly being detected in drinking water. Even when found in minuscule amounts, the number of compounds that end up in the public's drinking water, combined with long-term cumulative exposure to these compounds, becomes worrisome. Studies by the CDC found that even at very low levels of exposure, pharmaceutical compounds may affect physiological responses in humans, plants, and animals, and can lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria

in water. Medications that end up in landfills also pose a threat to municipal drinking water supplies.

“When you throw it in the trash, there's a potential for contamination from this material,” says Hans Kernkamp, general manager and chief engineer of the Riverside County Department of Waste Resources. “Taking it to the landfill—even though it's lined and hopefully does a good job of preventing groundwater contamination—nobody can say that it's 100 percent foolproof, so there's always that possibility.”

A safe and convenient solution

Rather than risk misuse or pollution, pharmaceutical take-back bins provide safe and anonymous year-round options for residents to get rid of unused medications.

“Patients and their families are looking for a way to get rid of old medications, just to help simplify what they have at home and make sure that people who could be harmed by accidental ingestion don't have access to them,” says Dr. Rais Vohra, Interim health officer with the Fresno County Department of Public Health. “Take-back programs allow people both an opportunity and a place to do that.”

To find a bin, go to [medtakebackcalifornia.org](https://www.medtakebackcalifornia.org). Brought to you by the California Drug Take-Back Program and the California Product Stewardship Council

WHAT'S THE OPIOID PICTURE IN CALIFORNIA?



7,385
deaths



21,316
emergency
department visits



13.6 million
prescriptions

Opioid prescriptions in California are decreasing, thanks to a concentrated effort to fight this crisis.

But a lot of work still needs to be done.

Drug-related overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States. More than three out of five drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.

But the numbers don't stop there.

In 2022, health officials tallied these opioid-related statistics:

- 7,385 deaths
- 21,316 emergency department visits
- 13.6 million prescriptions

To find a bin, go to medtakebackcalifornia.org. Brought to you by the California Drug Take-Back Program and the California Product Stewardship Council