

KEEPING SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY SAFE TOGETHER



Community members can join law enforcement, local government and health professionals in protecting San Joaquin County. Learn how:



Lock Up
Medications
page 3



Don't Rush to Flush
Medications or Needles
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Meds in the Bin,
We All Win
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Community leaders, like San Joaquin County Supervisor Bob Elliott, have come together to install medication and sharps disposal bins to protect residents.
PHOTO BY ROBIN EAGAN

Proper Disposal Keeps Us All SAFE

San Joaquin County residents have a new way to safely dispose of unwanted medications and used needles

by Rodney Orosco



IMPROPER DISPOSAL PUTS US ALL IN DANGER

Improper disposal of medication or needles affects the entire community — from fueling drug addiction and threatening public safety to needles being found in parks, waterways and even libraries.



Criminals may use medications that are tossed into the trash or sell them on the black market. This risk is even greater in neighborhoods where there are large numbers of seniors.



Used **sharps** that have been thrown into the trash or recycling accidentally stick workers and can expose them to diseases.



"I have talked to code enforcement staff and when they have to secure an empty house, they come across a lot of **sharps**," explained City of Stockton Solid Waste Manager Gretchen Olsen. However, the most shocking needle surprise comes at the library. "People are putting **sharps** in the library book return slots," she said.

Properly disposing of unwanted medications and used sharps — such as needles, lancets and auto-injectors — is a safety priority for individuals and the community.

Flushing these items may seem like an easy option for disposal but it is actually a *serious* environmental and health hazard. In actuality, treatment plants are not designed to remove medications from the water. That means some medication that is flushed ends up in our waterways and, eventually, in our drinking water.

If you can't flush then the trash is the next best option, right?

Wrong.

"Medications thrown in the garbage can become fuel for addiction, result in an overdose, or cause accidental poisoning," said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

These common disposal problems are easily preventable.

Thankfully, disposing of medication in San Joaquin County is easy: Take the unwanted medication to one of the County's DEA-authorized disposal locations and then drop it into a specially designated bin.

However, safety does not end at the medicine cabinet. Because some medications and medical tests are taken by blood, special care must be taken to dispose of these needles, also called sharps. Used sharps are considered hazardous waste and must also be quickly and properly disposed of — and the toilet is *not* an option.

**"This effort is
the result of a
partnership among
a broad range of
stakeholder groups."**

Bob Elliott

District 5 Supervisor
San Joaquin County

Sharps flushed down the toilet can become lodged in equipment, forcing county workers to remove them by hand, exposing workers to accidental and dangerous needle sticks. Tossing sharps in the trash or recycling is illegal in the state of California because of Senate Bill 1305, which was passed in 2006 to protect waste workers.

Used sharps need to be properly disposed of in a designated sharps container and then taken to a sharps disposal location. Just like medication disposal, sharps disposal only takes one easy step.

There are currently dozens of sharps and medication disposal bins located throughout the County with more on the way, thanks to a unique collaborative effort between the City of Stockton, San Joaquin County and other area organizations.

"This effort is the result of a partnership among a broad range of stakeholder groups," San Joaquin County Supervisor

Bob Elliott said. "Thank you to all the community leaders and organizations that made these disposal bins possible, including San Joaquin County Public Works, The Rose Foundation, and the California Product Stewardship Council."



Find out where to drop off unwanted medications and sharps at www.sjcrecycle.org or call San Joaquin County Public Works at 209-468-3000.

Protecting Our CHILDREN

Lock up your medications! You might save the life of someone you love

by Rodney Orosco



Sandra Chavez's youngest son, Jeff, died as a result of prescription drug abuse that began when he was a teen. Sandra's family learned of his addiction when he was arrested for being in possession of meds not intended for him.

PHOTO BY RON NABITY

Today, Americans fill nearly three times as many prescriptions as they did in 1980 and spend five times as much on over-the-counter drugs, according to a report by Safe Kids Worldwide. This increase in more household medications has also resulted in a dangerous unintended consequence.

"Having medications in the home can increase the risk of accidental ingestion or poisonings, leading to a significant number of emergency room visits. Especially in toddlers," said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

And that phenomenon includes San Joaquin County. Over the past five years, there have been 800 visits to emergency departments in the region by children under the age of five due to accidental poisonings.

The nationwide statistics are just as shocking. Poison control centers get a call about a child ingesting medication that they "found" once a minute — every day. **Emergency rooms see roughly four busloads — or over 300 — poisoned children daily**, all from medications that should have been properly secured or removed from the home when they were no longer needed and properly disposed of.

"Safe medicine storage means out of sight and out of reach — not one or the other."

Rachel Zerbo
Coalition Coordinator
Safe Kids San Joaquin County

Keeping children safe from accidental medication poisoning is about not assuming — not assuming the medication is out of reach of a child and not assuming a child-proof bottle is actually child proof.

"Safe medicine storage means out of sight and out of reach — not one or the other," said Safe Kids San Joaquin County Coalition Coordinator Rachel Zerbo. "To be safe, medicine should be stored out of sight in a cabinet or drawer where children can't see it and the medication should be out of reach."

The dangers of easy-to-reach medications in the home are not limited to only toddlers.

"Teens are also vulnerable to medication poisoning," said Zerbo. "They may be curious about the effects of medications, or they can be easily influenced by peer pressure."

While parents can secure medications in the home, it is not enough. All adults with children in their lives should take precautions to keep medication out of reach. Children can easily find medication in a purse,

bedside table or on a kitchen countertop.

"If a child spends time at a grandparent or other caregiver's home, parents need to make sure those caregivers are also storing their medication safely," said Zerbo.



SAFE AT HOME



Thousands of children in the U.S. find their way into **medicine bottles they shouldn't** each year, including children in San Joaquin County.



800 visits to San Joaquin County emergency rooms in the past five years by children under the age of 5 were due to accidental poisonings.



64 percent of those visits were attributed to **medications**.

DO

- **DO** lock up medications.
- **DO** store medications in their original containers — labels can help prevent medications from being mixed up.
- **DO** keep an updated list of all prescription medication in your home, so you know if something goes missing.
- **DO** talk to your pharmacist about how to properly dispose of unused medications.

DON'T

- **DON'T** leave medications where kids or pets can get them.
- **DON'T** share prescription medications. A medication that works for one person may cause harm — even death — to someone else, even if symptoms are similar.
- **DON'T** take medications in front of children, which can lead to them imitating this behavior.

Don't RUSH to FLUSH Medications!

Medicine can end up in waterways, risking human and environmental health

by Anne Stokes

Flushing unused and expired medications down the drain may be what you were told to do to get rid of them. Even the Federal Drug Administration controversially tells the public to discard some of the most addictive medications down the drain to avoid accidental poisonings or purposeful misuse if there is no take-back program available. However, the effects of flushing pharmaceuticals can have long-term and wide-spread ramifications on both humans and the environment. It is a threat that is real and growing.

While most people know that anything flushed down the drain ends up at a water treatment plant, most aren't aware of the intricate processes involved in water cleaning. According to Brandon Nakagawa, Water Resource Coordinator with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works, those processes 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," he said. "Pharmaceuticals are something that our systems aren't necessarily designed to remove."

After being treated, this water can be routinely used as drinking water. But according to the Environmental Protection Agency, pharmaceuticals are increasingly being

detected in drinking water. Even when found in miniscule 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.

"You have unused medicines mixing together into an unintended soup and getting into groundwater, and often then getting into waterways," said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment. "It's a type of pollution, short and simple, and it doesn't make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out."

While technology that can remove pharmaceutical compounds from water is starting to emerge, it can be very expensive and still isn't used or required at most waste water treatment plants. Thus, the best and least costly way to keep medications out of local water supplies is to dispose of them through convenient disposal bins or collection events throughout San Joaquin County.

"Maybe we won't know for decades the exact effects of pharmaceuticals in the water, maybe we'll know sooner than later, but why take the chance?" Nakagawa said. "Let's do the right thing and dispose of things properly."



PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

"It doesn't make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out."

Tim Little

Executive Director

Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment



THE COST OF FLUSHING



- Only **half of medications** in sewage can be removed by water treatment plants once flushed, as found in a 2013 report by the International Joint Commission, leading to traces of medications showing up in drinking water supplies.



- Intact medications are **more potent** than excreted drugs, which have been metabolized.
- Pharmaceutical compounds may affect physiological responses in humans, plants and animals, according to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



- Estrogen and testosterone used in certain medications — as well as other endocrine disruptors — **cause significant reproductive effects on aquatic wildlife**, even at very low levels of exposure.



- Trace amounts of antibiotics lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria in our water.
- The wide array of medications found in waterways can have **unanticipated impacts** on drinking water supplies and wildlife.

STICK SHARPS

in Their Place — a Certified Container

Used sharps are a danger when not disposed of properly

by Rodney Orosco

Lorena Dominguez's day at work started just like any other, but ended in panic. As a recycling line worker at the Stockton Recycling Material Recycling Facility (MRF), Dominguez's job is to watch the line as items whiz by and remove any that are not recyclable. Dominguez does this by hand, grabbing items like plastic bags, garbage, dirty food containers and toys when she sees them.

But what Dominguez did not see one day was a needle hidden in a bag underneath a pizza box.

"When I first got stuck, my first thought was that it was a needle because I felt the pain," Dominguez said. "I stopped the line and discovered the needle was in the bag I was holding. It was full of loose needles."

What happened next is all too common for recycling line workers: months of treatment accompanied by months of worry.

"It took four months to finally receive an answer that everything was OK," she said. "My family was worried because they did not know what that needle could be infected with."

Because of the improper disposal of sharps, needle sticks are a far too common hazard for MRF workers.

"Every day our workers see needles coming across the recycling line," said Stockton Recycling MRF General Manager Michael White.

Even being careful or wearing heavy gloves doesn't always protect workers from an accidental stick.

"Being stuck [by a needle] is definitely one of the biggest scares for our employees,"

Michael White
General Manager
Stockton Recycling Materials
Recycling Facility

"Being stuck [by a needle] is definitely one of the biggest scares for our employees," White said.

There is still danger when needles are placed into plastic containers and thrown in the trash or recycling. These containers can burst when compressed in garbage trucks during collection, causing the sharps to mix in with the recyclables.

"We see plastic milk jugs full of needles," White said. "The caps pop off the jugs, the needles spill out, or the needles poke through the plastic and jab one of the workers."

Needles are not only a safety concern on the line, they are also a productivity concern — which costs money.

"We have to stop the line when we see needles. It is a hard stop," White said.

The result is dozens of paid workers standing around while they wait for the issue to be resolved.

All these problems can be solved if San Joaquin County residents keep their used sharps out of the trash and dispose of them properly the first time, by using one

of the County's disposal bins.

While Dominguez, a three-year veteran of the recycling line, is not afraid to get back to the line, many victims of an accidental stick do not return to work because of stress. Dominguez does express concern.

"I am more cautious and feel anxious when there is a bigger pile of material coming through the line," she said.



Michael White's workers at the Stockton Recycling Material Recycling Facility, like Lorena Dominguez, are constantly at risk of being stuck by an improperly disposed of needle. But it doesn't have to be that way.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



SHARPS SAFETY

Disposing of used sharps and needles correctly is not only the **law in California**, it is a simple act that can protect the **community**.



4 months: How long it takes to test a waste or recycling worker who has been stuck by an improperly disposed of needle, before it is determined if they are clear of diseases such as hepatitis or HIV. It is months of anxiety no one should have to endure.



Best way to protect workers: Store your used sharps properly in an **approved container** until they can be taken to a disposal bin.

DO

- **DO** take needles to a pharmacy or other location with a proper disposal bin.
- **DO** put sharps in an FDA-cleared container prior to putting them in the disposal bin.
- **DO** ask your pharmacist how to properly dispose of unused medications.

DON'T

- **DON'T** throw needles into the trash.
- **DON'T** flush needles down the toilet.
- **DON'T** place needles in a plastic container and then throw that container into the garbage or recycling.

WHAT TO PUT IN A DISPOSAL BIN

Medications



Sprays



Liquid Medications



Pill Medications

Sharps



Needles



Lancets



Auto Injector

Responsible and CONVENIENT

Proper disposal is easy in San Joaquin County

by Anne Stokes

As any good real estate agent will tell you, it's all about location, location, location. That's why in the City of Stockton and the rest of San Joaquin County, community partners are working together to make it easy for residents to responsibly dispose of their unwanted medication and used medical sharps.

"If it's not easy and convenient, people just won't do it," said David Gorton, Planning and Materials Management Section Manager with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works. "So long as people have convenient local options, they'll take advantage of those. If they don't, they will more than likely end up improperly disposing of these items in the garbage, down the drain or toilet — ways that endanger the environment or put our solid waste workers at risk."

Currently, there are dozens of medication and sharps disposal bins throughout the county, with more on the way. Located mainly in pharmacies and police stations, residents can drop off items anytime the store or office is open for business.

Improperly disposed of materials pose safety and environmental risks. Sharps thrown away in the trash or recycling bin have been known to injure sanitation or

recycling facility workers. Medications, whether they're flushed down the drain or end up in a landfill, eventually make their way into local waterways and public drinking supplies. Medications left in cabinets can also be targets for theft or accidentally ingested by young children or seniors who may mistakenly take the wrong medicine.

Collection bins are for prescription and over-the-counter medications, but not vitamins. Medications should be removed from their bottles and placed into zip top plastic bags before being deposited into the bins. Empty pill bottles can then be recycled with regular curbside plastic recycling. When using the bins, be sure to secure any packaging so that pills and liquids don't leak.

Sharps — which cannot be deposited in pharmaceutical bins — must be in a hard plastic container before being deposited in the specially designated sharps kiosk.

While collection bins are the most convenient way to safely dispose of medications and sharps, the County's household hazardous waste facility also holds regular take-back events and accepts these materials from county residents, free of charge.

To find the closest disposal bin to you, visit www.sjcrecycle.org.

"If it's not easy and convenient, people just won't do it."

David Gorton
Planning and Materials Management Section Manager, San Joaquin County Department of Public Works

It's EASY to do it RIGHT

San Joaquin County is growing its disposal programs with help from the Rose Foundation

"It benefits the environment and it's the right thing to do from a medical perspective."

Harold Reich
Owner and Pharmacist
Reich's Pharmacy

by Anne Stokes



Since 1990, Pharmacist Harold Reich's business plan has revolved around service to his community. For many years, Reich's Pharmacy accepted and disposed of customers' unused pharmaceuticals at the company's expense simply because it was the right thing to do. But when the practice became too costly, San Joaquin County stepped in by creating a pilot medication take-back program in 2016.

"The disposal bins have made it something that we can definitely participate in as a business. It's a community service that we try to promote," Reich said. "I think it's two-fold — I think it benefits the environment and it's the right thing to do from a medical perspective."

The County was able to help due in part to a grant from the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit dedicated to providing resources that allow communities to participate in environmental causes that affect their residents. The organization granted \$200,000 to the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) to expand San Joaquin County's existing program. CPSC increased the number of medica-

tion disposal bins and gave residents an easy and responsible disposal option so they wouldn't flush medications down the drain and into the environment.

"I think most people want to do the right thing, and I think as humans we're all driven toward doing the easy thing, because we're all busy people," said Tim Little, the Rose Foundation's Executive Director. "That's what the take-back is about, making it easy to do the right thing."

Reich said he is still astounded at the volume of expired medications his customers have at home and wouldn't know what to do with, if not for the program. If left in the home, these medications could have the potential to be misused.

"It's scary really, in some regards, that they have access to something that's been expired for many years," he said. "Getting those things out of the medicine cabinets in people's homes reduces the temptation and likelihood that somebody will get a hold of something they shouldn't, and cause themselves or others harm."

Properly disposing of unwanted medications and used sharps is critical to keeping San Joaquin County's waters clean — like the San Joaquin River, pictured here. But proper disposal comes at a cost.
PHOTO BY ROBIN EAGAN



WHO PAYS to Keep Water Clean?

Because medication disposal costs the government, you do

by Anne Stokes

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is just what it sounds like: extending the responsibilities of manufacturers past the sale of their products. It requires producers to clean up their own mess, so to speak.

“Our society is really good at producing stuff, but we’re not really good at taking responsibility for it once it’s been used,” said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit that provides communities with resources to get involved in ecological issues. “By having producer responsibility, you start to get mechanisms to properly manage them.”

According to Heidi Sanborn, Co-founder and Executive Director of the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC), producers should share the responsibility for the life cycle of products they create and sell — meaning they should be on the hook for costs associated with safely recycling or disposing of the materials.

But what happens instead is local governments — and taxpayers, like those in San Joaquin County — foot the bill for safe disposal programs and events, including those that accept unwanted medications and used sharps. These programs may be free at point of disposal for residents, but have a high price tag for the local governments that are funded by the residents.

“Our country has privatized profits and socialized costs. We don’t think that’s fair,” Sanborn said. “The bottom line is that local governments cannot afford to provide the programs to the level that they need to be available to get a high level of participation from the public.”

The producers of these products argue that if they paid for disposal and take-back programs, they would ultimately pass these costs on to consumers in the form of more expensive products. But Sanborn says that consumers are already paying costs through their local governments.

“What we’ve done with this current system is to bury the costs, so nobody knows what they’re paying for,” she said. “Taxpayers don’t know that a fluorescent lamp costs as much to recycle as it does to buy. They just drop it off for ‘free’ at their public facility. But it’s not free at all.”

“Our country has privatized profits and socialized costs.”

Heidi Sanborn

Co-founder and Executive Director
 California Product Stewardship
 Council (CPSC)



CPSC first got involved in pharmaceutical EPR issues due to public demand in San Francisco and Alameda counties.

“County officials were getting so much public demand for more collection opportunities for a variety of reasons — drug abuse prevention, law enforcement, water quality — that they wanted to make producers responsible, and that just happens to be our policy area,” Sanborn said.

Sanborn points to successful pharmaceutical and sharps take-back programs in Canada and Mexico as models for California and how to support the proper disposal of hazardous items.

“It’s not only the right thing to do, it’s a matter of public health and safety,” she said. “Twenty years from now our hope is that nothing goes onto the market that has no end-of-life management program in place.”

To learn more about Extended Producer Responsibility and good product stewardship, visit www.calpsc.org.



PUT IT IN A
 DISPOSAL BIN

The Alameda MED-Project Product Stewardship Plan was approved by the County’s Department of Environmental Health in 2015. The program’s goal: to provide Alameda County residents with convenient, safe and accessible ways to get rid of their unused pharmaceuticals. This successful program — funded by pharmaceutical companies — is a solid example of how local communities can create solutions to problems without putting that burden on taxpayers.

In 2017, the MED-Project (a manufacturer-funded program operating in nine California counties):



Collected **15,750 pounds** of pharmaceuticals in **32 bins** located throughout Alameda County



Held **12 one-day** collection events which collected **3,155 pounds** of unwanted medicine



Currently: Alameda County has dozens of take-back bin locations, with **37 more sites** planned to be implemented by the end of 2018

DISPOSAL LOCATIONS IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Legend

  : Disposal bins for meds and sharps
 : Disposal bin for sharps only

 : Disposal bin for meds only
 : Does not accept controlled substances

Escalon

- 1 Escalon Police Department**
2040 McHenry Ave.
Escalon, CA 95320
209-838-7093

- 2 Vineyard Pharmacy and Gifts**
1900 McHenry Ave., Ste. 202
Escalon, CA 95320
209-838-0511


Lockeford

- 3 Lockeford Drug**
14090 CA-88
Lockeford, CA 95237
209-727-5527

- 4 Young's Payless Market – IGA**
18980 CA-88
Lockeford, CA 95237
209-727-3762


Lodi

- 5 Community Medical Centers, Lodi**
2401 W. Turner Road, Ste. 450
Lodi, CA 95242
209-370-1700
 
- 6 Fairmont Pharmacy**
1121 W. Vine St., Ste. 13
Lodi, CA 95240
209-625-8633


- 7 Lodi Police Department**
215 W. Elm St.
Lodi, CA 95240
209-333-6728


- 8 Walgreens**
75 N. Ham Lane
Lodi, CA 95242
209-369-8575


Manteca

- 9 City of Manteca Solid Waste Division Admin Office**
210 E. Wetmore St.
Manteca, CA 95337
209-456-8440


- 10 Community Medical Center, Manteca**
200 Cottage Ave., Ste. 103
Manteca, CA 95336
209-624-5800
 

- 11 Manteca Police Department**
1001 W. Center St.
Manteca, CA 95337
209-239-8401


Ripon

- 12 Ripon Police Department**
259 N. Wilma Ave.
Ripon, CA 95366
209-599-2102
 

Stockton

- 13 Angkor Pharmacy**
4555 N. Pershing Ave., Ste. 7
Stockton, CA 95207
209-473-4706


- 14 Community Medical Centers, Channel**
701 E. Channel St.
Stockton, CA 95202
209-944-4700
 

- 15 Community Medical Centers, Waterloo**
1031 Waterloo Road
Stockton, CA 95205
209-940-5600
 

- 16 Dignity Health – St. Joseph's Medical Center**
1800 N. California St.
Stockton, CA 95204
209-943-2000


- 17 El Dorado Drug Store**
2005 S. East Mariposa Road
Stockton, CA 95205
209-464-7722


- 18 Forty Nine Drug Co.**
937 N. Yosemite St.
Stockton, CA 95203
209-465-2671


- 19 Kaiser Permanente Pharmacy**
7373 West Lane, 1st Floor
Stockton, CA 95210
209-476-3242


- 20 Rx Express Pharmacy**
711 E. Market St.
Stockton, CA 95202
209-465-1001


- 21 San Joaquin County Household Hazardous Waste Facility**
7850 R.A. Bridgeford St.
Stockton, CA 95206
209-468-3066


Tracy

- 22 Abala Pharmacy**
550 W. Eaton Ave., Ste. B
Tracy, CA 95376
209-832-7080


- 23 Grant Line Pharmacy**
2160 W. Grant Line Road, Ste. 205
Tracy, CA 95377
209-832-2999


- 24 Harold K. Reich's Pharmacy**
39 W. 10th St.
Tracy, CA 95376
209-835-1832


- 25 Tracy Police Department**
1000 Civic Center Drive
Tracy, CA 95376
209-831-6550


- 26 Tracy Material Recovery Facility**
30703 S. MacArthur Drive
Tracy, CA 95377
209-832-2355


- 27 Tracy Recycling Buyback Center**
590 10th St.
Tracy, CA 95376
209-832-1024


More locations coming! Find an updated list at
www.sjcrecycle.org
 or call 209-468-3000.

PUT THESE ITEMS INTO DISPOSAL BINS

Medication bins accept:

- Sprays
- Liquids
- Pills
- Pet medications
- Ointments/lotions

Make sure pills are in
 zip top bags, and any
 containers are shut tight!



Sharps bins accept:

- Needles
- Lancets
- Auto injectors

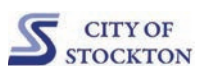
Put these items into a
 hard plastic container
 before placing them in
 a bin!



CPSC
www.calpsc.org
 916-706-3420



Rose Foundation
www.rosefdn.org
 510-658-0702



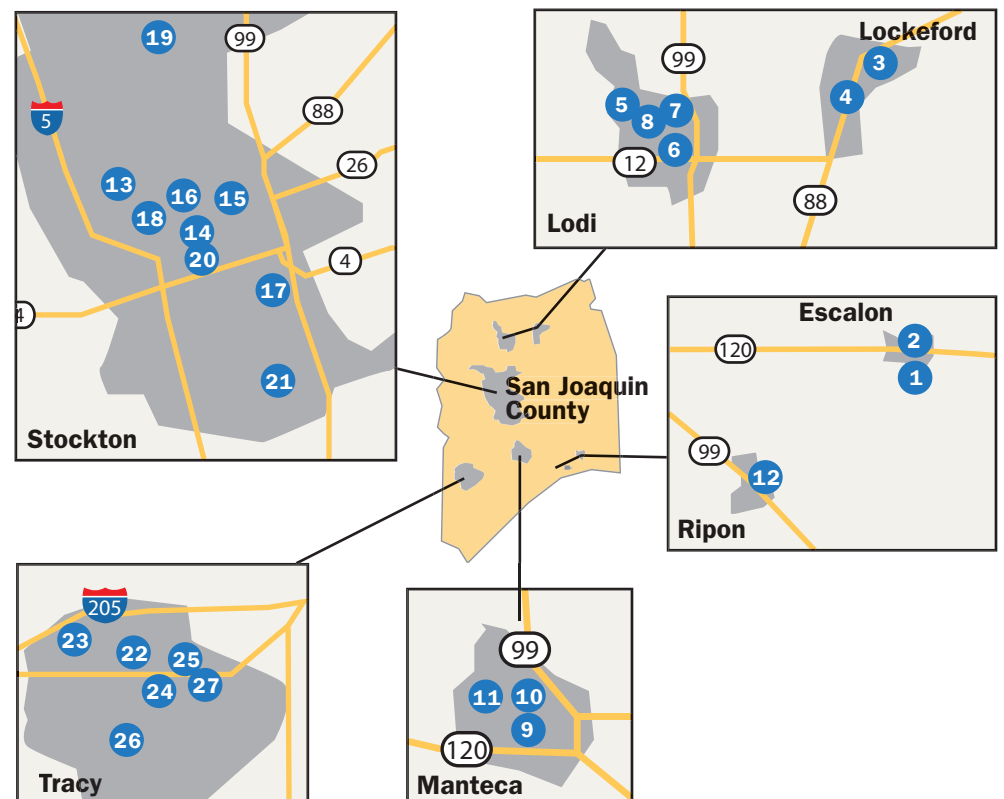
City of Stockton
www.stocktonrecycles.com
 209-937-8331



SJC County
www.sjcrecycle.org
 209-468-3000



Produced for CPSC and San Joaquin County partners
 by N&R Publications, www.nrpubs.com





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PHOTO BY ROBIN EAGAN

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If you can't flush then the trash is the next best option, right?

Wrong.

"Medications thrown in the garbage can become fuel for addiction, result in an overdose, or cause accidental poisoning," said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

These common disposal problems are easily preventable.

Thankfully, disposing of medication in San Joaquin County is easy: Take the unwanted medication to one of the County's DEA-authorized disposal locations and then drop it into a specially designated bin.

However, safety does not end at the medicine cabinet. Because some medications and medical tests are taken by blood, special care must be taken to dispose of these needles, also called sharps. Used sharps are considered hazardous waste and must also be quickly and properly disposed of — and the toilet is *not* an option.

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There are currently dozens of sharps and medication disposal bins located throughout the County with more on the way, thanks to a unique collaborative effort between the City of Stockton, San Joaquin County and other area organizations.

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Bob Elliott said. "Thank you to all the community leaders and organizations that made these disposal bins possible, including San Joaquin County Public Works, The Rose Foundation, and the California Product Stewardship Council."



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by Rodney Orosco



Sandra Chavez's youngest son, Jeff, died as a result of prescription drug abuse that began when he was a teen. Sandra's family learned of his addiction when he was arrested for being in possession of meds not intended for him.

PHOTO BY RON NABITY

Today, Americans fill nearly three times as many prescriptions as they did in 1980 and spend five times as much on over-the-counter drugs, according to a report by Safe Kids Worldwide. This increase in more household medications has also resulted in a dangerous unintended consequence.

"Having medications in the home can increase the risk of accidental ingestion or poisonings, leading to a significant number of emergency room visits. Especially in toddlers," said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

And that phenomenon includes San Joaquin County. Over the past five years, there have been 800 visits to emergency departments in the region by children under the age of five due to accidental poisonings.

The nationwide statistics are just as shocking. Poison control centers get a call about a child ingesting medication that they "found" once a minute — every day. **Emergency rooms see roughly four busloads — or over 300 — poisoned children daily**, all from medications that should have been properly secured or removed from the home when they were no longer needed and properly disposed of.

Keeping children safe from accidental medication poisoning is about not assuming — not assuming the medication is out of reach of a child and not assuming a child-proof bottle is actually child proof.

"Safe medicine storage means out of sight and out of reach — not one or the other," said Safe Kids San Joaquin County Coalition Coordinator Rachel Zerbo. "To be safe, medicine should be stored out of sight in a cabinet or drawer where children can't see it and the medication should be out of reach."

The dangers of easy-to-reach medications in the home are not limited to only toddlers.

"Teens are also vulnerable to medication poisoning," said Zerbo. "They may be curious about the effects of medications, or they can be easily influenced by peer pressure."

While parents can secure medications in the home, it is not enough. All adults with children in their lives should take precautions to keep medication out of reach. Children can easily find medication in a purse,

bedside table or on a kitchen countertop.

"If a child spends time at a grandparent or other caregiver's home, parents need to make sure those caregivers are also storing their medication safely," said Zerbo.

"Safe medicine storage means out of sight and out of reach — not one or the other."

Rachel Zerbo
Coalition Coordinator
Safe Kids San Joaquin County



SAFE AT HOME



Thousands of children in the U.S. find their way into **medicine bottles they shouldn't** each year, including children in San Joaquin County.



800 visits to San Joaquin County emergency rooms in the past five years by children under the age of 5 were due to accidental poisonings.



64 percent of those visits were attributed to **medications**.

DO

- **DO** lock up medications.
- **DO** store medications in their original containers — labels can help prevent medications from being mixed up.
- **DO** keep an updated list of all prescription medication in your home, so you know if something goes missing.
- **DO** talk to your pharmacist about how to properly dispose of unused medications.

DON'T

- **DON'T** leave medications where kids or pets can get them.
- **DON'T** share prescription medications. A medication that works for one person may cause harm — even death — to someone else, even if symptoms are similar.
- **DON'T** take medications in front of children, which can lead to them imitating this behavior.

Don't RUSH to FLUSH Medications!

Medicine can end up in waterways, risking human and environmental health

by Anne Stokes

Flushing unused and expired medications down the drain may be what you were told to do to get rid of them. Even the Federal Drug Administration controversially tells the public to discard some of the most addictive medications down the drain to avoid accidental poisonings or purposeful misuse if there is no take-back program available. However, the effects of flushing pharmaceuticals can have long-term and wide-spread ramifications on both humans and the environment. It is a threat that is real and growing.

While most people know that anything flushed down the drain ends up at a water treatment plant, most aren't aware of the intricate processes involved in water cleaning. According to Brandon Nakagawa, Water Resource Coordinator with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works, those processes 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," he said. "Pharmaceuticals are something that our systems aren't necessarily designed to remove."

After being treated, this water can be routinely used as drinking water. But according to the Environmental Protection Agency, pharmaceuticals are increasingly being

detected in drinking water. Even when found in miniscule 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.

"You have unused medicines mixing together into an unintended soup and getting into groundwater, and often then getting into waterways," said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment. "It's a type of pollution, short and simple, and it doesn't make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out."

While technology that can remove pharmaceutical compounds from water is starting to emerge, it can be very expensive and still isn't used or required at most waste water treatment plants. Thus, the best and least costly way to keep medications out of local water supplies is to dispose of them through convenient disposal bins or collection events throughout San Joaquin County.

"Maybe we won't know for decades the exact effects of pharmaceuticals in the water, maybe we'll know sooner than later, but why take the chance?" Nakagawa said. "Let's do the right thing and dispose of things properly."



PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

"It doesn't make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out."

Tim Little

Executive Director

Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment



THE COST OF FLUSHING



- Only **half of medications** in sewage can be removed by water treatment plants once flushed, as found in a 2013 report by the International Joint Commission, leading to traces of medications showing up in drinking water supplies.



- Intact medications are **more potent** than excreted drugs, which have been metabolized.
- Pharmaceutical compounds may affect physiological responses in humans, plants and animals, according to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



- Estrogen and testosterone used in certain medications — as well as other endocrine disruptors — **cause significant reproductive effects on aquatic wildlife**, even at very low levels of exposure.



- Trace amounts of antibiotics lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria in our water.
- The wide array of medications found in waterways can have **unanticipated impacts** on drinking water supplies and wildlife.

STICK SHARPS

in Their Place — a Certified Container

Used sharps are a danger when not disposed of properly

by Rodney Orosco

Lorena Dominguez's day at work started just like any other, but ended in panic. As a recycling line worker at the Stockton Recycling Material Recycling Facility (MRF), Dominguez's job is to watch the line as items whiz by and remove any that are not recyclable. Dominguez does this by hand, grabbing items like plastic bags, garbage, dirty food containers and toys when she sees them.

But what Dominguez did not see one day was a needle hidden in a bag underneath a pizza box.

"When I first got stuck, my first thought was that it was a needle because I felt the pain," Dominguez said. "I stopped the line and discovered the needle was in the bag I was holding. It was full of loose needles."

What happened next is all too common for recycling line workers: months of treatment accompanied by months of worry.

"It took four months to finally receive an answer that everything was OK," she said. "My family was worried because they did not know what that needle could be infected with."

Because of the improper disposal of sharps, needle sticks are a far too common hazard for MRF workers.

"Every day our workers see needles coming across the recycling line," said Stockton Recycling MRF General Manager Michael White.

Even being careful or wearing heavy gloves doesn't always protect workers from an accidental stick.

"Being stuck [by a needle] is definitely one of the biggest scares for our employees," White said.

There is still danger when needles are placed into plastic containers and thrown in the trash or recycling. These containers can burst when compressed in garbage trucks during collection, causing the sharps to mix in with the recyclables.

"We see plastic milk jugs full of needles," White said. "The caps pop off the jugs, the needles spill out, or the needles poke through the plastic and jab one of the workers."

Needles are not only a safety concern on the line, they are also a productivity concern — which costs money.

"We have to stop the line when we see needles. It is a hard stop," White said.

The result is dozens of paid workers standing around while they wait for the issue to be resolved.

All these problems can be solved if San Joaquin County residents keep their used sharps out of the trash and dispose of them properly the first time, by using one

of the County's disposal bins.

While Dominguez, a three-year veteran of the recycling line, is not afraid to get back to the line, many victims of an accidental stick do not return to work because of stress. Dominguez does express concern.

"I am more cautious and feel anxious when there is a bigger pile of material coming through the line," she said.

"Being stuck [by a needle] is definitely one of the biggest scares for our employees,"

Michael White
General Manager
Stockton Recycling Materials
Recycling Facility



Michael White's workers at the Stockton Recycling Material Recycling Facility, like Lorena Dominguez, are constantly at risk of being stuck by an improperly disposed of needle. But it doesn't have to be that way.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



SHARPS SAFETY

Disposing of used sharps and needles correctly is not only the **law in California**, it is a simple act that can protect the **community**.



4 months: How long it takes to test a waste or recycling worker who has been stuck by an improperly disposed of needle, before it is determined if they are clear of diseases such as hepatitis or HIV. It is months of anxiety no one should have to endure.



Best way to protect workers: Store your used sharps properly in an **approved container** until they can be taken to a disposal bin.

DO

- **DO** take needles to a pharmacy or other location with a proper disposal bin.
- **DO** put sharps in an FDA-cleared container prior to putting them in the disposal bin.
- **DO** ask your pharmacist how to properly dispose of unused medications.

DON'T

- **DON'T** throw needles into the trash.
- **DON'T** flush needles down the toilet.
- **DON'T** place needles in a plastic container and then throw that container into the garbage or recycling.

WHAT TO PUT IN A DISPOSAL BIN

Medications



Sprays



Liquid Medications



Pill Medications

Sharps



Needles



Lancets



Auto Injector

Responsible and CONVENIENT

Proper disposal is easy in San Joaquin County

by Anne Stokes

As any good real estate agent will tell you, it's all about location, location, location. That's why in the City of Stockton and the rest of San Joaquin County, community partners are working together to make it easy for residents to responsibly dispose of their unwanted medication and used medical sharps.

"If it's not easy and convenient, people just won't do it," said David Gorton, Planning and Materials Management Section Manager with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works. "So long as people have convenient local options, they'll take advantage of those. If they don't, they will more than likely end up improperly disposing of these items in the garbage, down the drain or toilet — ways that endanger the environment or put our solid waste workers at risk."

Currently, there are dozens of medication and sharps disposal bins throughout the county, with more on the way. Located mainly in pharmacies and police stations, residents can drop off items anytime the store or office is open for business.

Improperly disposed of materials pose safety and environmental risks. Sharps thrown away in the trash or recycling bin have been known to injure sanitation or

recycling facility workers. Medications, whether they're flushed down the drain or end up in a landfill, eventually make their way into local waterways and public drinking supplies. Medications left in cabinets can also be targets for theft or accidentally ingested by young children or seniors who may mistakenly take the wrong medicine.

Collection bins are for prescription and over-the-counter medications, but not vitamins. Medications should be removed from their bottles and placed into zip top plastic bags before being deposited into the bins. Empty pill bottles can then be recycled with regular curbside plastic recycling. When using the bins, be sure to secure any packaging so that pills and liquids don't leak.

Sharps — which cannot be deposited in pharmaceutical bins — must be in a hard plastic container before being deposited in the specially designated sharps kiosk.

While collection bins are the most convenient way to safely dispose of medications and sharps, the County's household hazardous waste facility also holds regular take-back events and accepts these materials from county residents, free of charge.

To find the closest disposal bin to you, visit www.sjrecycle.org.

"If it's not easy and convenient, people just won't do it."

David Gorton
Planning and Materials
Management Section
Manager, San Joaquin County
Department of Public Works

It's EASY to do it RIGHT

San Joaquin County is growing its disposal programs with help from the Rose Foundation

"It benefits the environment and it's the right thing to do from a medical perspective."

Harold Reich
Owner and Pharmacist
Reich's Pharmacy

by Anne Stokes



Since 1990, Pharmacist Harold Reich's business plan has revolved around service to his community. For many years, Reich's Pharmacy accepted and disposed of customers' unused pharmaceuticals at the company's expense simply because it was the right thing to do. But when the practice became too costly, San Joaquin County stepped in by creating a pilot medication take-back program in 2016.

"The disposal bins have made it something that we can definitely participate in as a business. It's a community service that we try to promote," Reich said. "I think it's two-fold — I think it benefits the environment and it's the right thing to do from a medical perspective."

The County was able to help due in part to a grant from the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit dedicated to providing resources that allow communities to participate in environmental causes that affect their residents. The organization granted \$200,000 to the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) to expand San Joaquin County's existing program. CPSC increased the number of medica-

tion disposal bins and gave residents an easy and responsible disposal option so they wouldn't flush medications down the drain and into the environment.

"I think most people want to do the right thing, and I think as humans we're all driven toward doing the easy thing, because we're all busy people," said Tim Little, the Rose Foundation's Executive Director. "That's what the take-back is about, making it easy to do the right thing."

Reich said he is still astounded at the volume of expired medications his customers have at home and wouldn't know what to do with, if not for the program. If left in the home, these medications could have the potential to be misused.

"It's scary really, in some regards, that they have access to something that's been expired for many years," he said. "Getting those things out of the medicine cabinets in people's homes reduces the temptation and likelihood that somebody will get a hold of something they shouldn't, and cause themselves or others harm."

Properly disposing of unwanted medications and used sharps is critical to keeping San Joaquin County's waters clean — like the San Joaquin River, pictured here. But proper disposal comes at a cost.
PHOTO BY ROBIN EAGAN



WHO PAYS to Keep Water Clean?

Because medication disposal costs the government, you do

by Anne Stokes

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is just what it sounds like: extending the responsibilities of manufacturers past the sale of their products. It requires producers to clean up their own mess, so to speak.

“Our society is really good at producing stuff, but we’re not really good at taking responsibility for it once it’s been used,” said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit that provides communities with resources to get involved in ecological issues. “By having producer responsibility, you start to get mechanisms to properly manage them.”

According to Heidi Sanborn, Co-founder and Executive Director of the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC), producers should share the responsibility for the life cycle of products they create and sell — meaning they should be on the hook for costs associated with safely recycling or disposing of the materials.

But what happens instead is local governments — and taxpayers, like those in San Joaquin County — foot the bill for safe disposal programs and events, including those that accept unwanted medications and used sharps. These programs may be free at point of disposal for residents, but have a high price tag for the local governments that are funded by the residents.

“Our country has privatized profits and socialized costs. We don’t think that’s fair,” Sanborn said. “The bottom line is that local governments cannot afford to provide the programs to the level that they need to be available to get a high level of participation from the public.”

The producers of these products argue that if they paid for disposal and take-back programs, they would ultimately pass these costs on to consumers in the form of more expensive products. But Sanborn says that consumers are already paying costs through their local governments.

“What we’ve done with this current system is to bury the costs, so nobody knows what they’re paying for,” she said. “Taxpayers don’t know that a fluorescent lamp costs as much to recycle as it does to buy. They just drop it off for ‘free’ at their public facility. But it’s not free at all.”

“Our country has privatized profits and socialized costs.”

Heidi Sanborn

Co-founder and Executive Director
 California Product Stewardship
 Council (CPSC)



CPSC first got involved in pharmaceutical EPR issues due to public demand in San Francisco and Alameda counties.

“County officials were getting so much public demand for more collection opportunities for a variety of reasons — drug abuse prevention, law enforcement, water quality — that they wanted to make producers responsible, and that just happens to be our policy area,” Sanborn said.

Sanborn points to successful pharmaceutical and sharps take-back programs in Canada and Mexico as models for California and how to support the proper disposal of hazardous items.

“It’s not only the right thing to do, it’s a matter of public health and safety,” she said. “Twenty years from now our hope is that nothing goes onto the market that has no end-of-life management program in place.”

To learn more about Extended Producer Responsibility and good product stewardship, visit www.calpsc.org.



PUT IT IN A
 DISPOSAL BIN

The Alameda MED-Project Product Stewardship Plan was approved by the County’s Department of Environmental Health in 2015. The program’s goal: to provide Alameda County residents with convenient, safe and accessible ways to get rid of their unused pharmaceuticals. This successful program — funded by pharmaceutical companies — is a solid example of how local communities can create solutions to problems without putting that burden on taxpayers.

In 2017, the MED-Project (a manufacturer-funded program operating in nine California counties):



Collected **15,750 pounds** of pharmaceuticals in **32 bins** located throughout Alameda County



Held **12 one-day** collection events which collected **3,155 pounds** of unwanted medicine



Currently: Alameda County has dozens of take-back bin locations, with **37 more sites** planned to be implemented by the end of 2018