

# NEW SAFE DISPOSAL OPTIONS!

Drug take-back bins let you safely dispose of unwanted, unneeded, or expired medications



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Learn why disposing of unused medications is important – and easy



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Find out what can be dropped off in a bin – and what can't



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Learn what can happen if medications are disposed of in the trash or flushed down a drain





## SNAPSHOT OF CALIFORNIA OPIOID USE

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 U.S. More than three out of five drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.

But the numbers don't stop there. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **for every person who dies of an opioid overdose...**

**12** people are admitted to a treatment program

**25** are seen for complications in an emergency room

**105** report opioid addiction or dependence

**659** report using opioids for non-medical or non-prescribed purposes

In 2018, health officials tallied these opioid-related statics:

### California

**2,428** deaths

**8,832** emergency room visits

**19.8 million** prescriptions

### Del Norte County

**0** deaths

**13** emergency department visits

**27,049** prescriptions

### Humboldt County

**16** deaths

**60** emergency department visits

**121,113** prescriptions

### Mendocino County

**14** deaths

**26** emergency department visits

**87,550** prescriptions

### Sonoma County

**43** deaths

**220** emergency department visits

**346,619** prescriptions

### Trinity County

**2** deaths

**4** emergency department visits

**13,235** prescriptions

# A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Learn how and why disposing of unused medication is important—and easy

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

**W**e have all had the experience: Maybe your spouse didn't need the painkillers prescribed for recovery from surgery; maybe your teenager didn't use all of his acne medication because of side effects; maybe your elderly grandparent passed away, leaving a shoe box filled with prescription drugs.

If unused medications are thrown away in a garbage can, it is still possible that they may be illegally diverted. If drugs are flushed down a toilet or washed down the sink, they may end up in our landfills and waterways, harming wildlife and entering our drinking water.

Fortunately, there is an easy answer: Medication Take-Back

California Product Stewardship Council and its authors, State Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assemblymembers Phil Ting and Adam Gray. In fact, statistics from up and down the state show that medication bins can result in a significant reduction in opioid deaths when bins are put in place.

Hosting a bin through this program is easy and free—installation, maintenance, disposal and promotion. Bins can be placed in pharmacies, hospitals and law enforcement agencies. People disposing of medications in these bins can also remain anonymous—no need to talk to anyone or answer any questions.

"The bins are very convenient, just to have that access," says Jennifer Lombari, general manager of Mendo Recycle, which is responsible for emptying about 220 pounds of pharmaceuticals every quarter from the area's bins. "We have one at the sheriff's office, the senior center, some pharmacies. They just give us a call and say, 'OK, the bin is full.' (It's also important) to give people one more reason not to just throw (medications) in the garbage."

And best of all, the drugs are ultimately incinerated at a waste-to-energy facility and converted to renewable energy, a complete win-win.

*"We have one at the sheriff's office, the senior center, some pharmacies. They just give us a call and say, 'OK, the bin is full.'"*

Jennifer Lombari, general manager  
Mendo Recycle

Where do you get rid of them safely?

And safely is the operative word here, because unused medications that are not disposed of properly can cause a myriad of serious public safety concerns.

For example, if unused medications stay in your medicine cabinet, they can fall into the hands of a child or teenager, who could accidentally overdose or begin an addiction. Criminals searching for drugs, especially opioids, may come into your house posing as a prospective homebuyer—or attempt a break-in.

Bins. These bins are safe and convenient disposal options for prescription and over-the-counter medications.

These convenient bins are a part of the California Statewide Drug Take-Back Program, which was funded by a \$3 million grant from the Department of Health Care Services, and — specifically — its Medication Assisted Treatment program aimed at combating the opioid crisis. This is a prelude to the statewide bill, Senate Bill 212, which was signed into law by then-Gov. Jerry Brown on Sept. 30, 2018. SB 212 was a years-long effort by the

# KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE AND CLEAN

Drug take-back bins provide easy disposal options

BY ANNE STOKES

**A**long with the power to heal, medications also have the potential to cause harm when misused or improperly discarded. Drug take-back bins provide safe and convenient ways to keep unused medications out of the environment and out of the hands of those who would misuse them.

"We really like to have collection programs that are as close as possible to the place of purchase," says Tedd Ward, Director of the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority. "It should be as easy to properly dispose of unwanted meds as it was to purchase them in the first place. There really has to be a place for those prescription medications to go."

## Don't rush to flush

Even in the recent past, people were advised to flush unused medications down the drain. Unfortunately, what gets flushed down the toilet can pollute the same watersheds that often supply communities' drinking water.

"Flush[ing] medicines down the toilet can cause problems in wastewater treatment plants because no wastewater treatment plant is suited to remove these medicines," Ward says. "They are suspended in the liquids that are discharged

to the rivers and ocean. That's an issue because these things are biologically active."

## Not getting rid of unused medications has its risks

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 130 Americans die daily from opioid overdoses. In 2017, 36% of those opioid-related deaths involved *prescription* medications. Those medications also pose a risk to

medication take-back bins is simply the public's lack of awareness that such a resource exists.

"Many people aren't aware that medications shouldn't be disposed of in the trash or flushed down the toilet. Breaking bad habits is the first step," he says. "I really appreciate the work of the California Product Stewardship Council in helping deploy and promote the use of these bins. They do really important work

*"It should be as easy to properly dispose of unwanted meds as it was to purchase them in the first place."*

Tedd Ward  
Director, Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority

children and teens. Two-thirds of teens who admit to abusing painkillers say they got them out of home medicine cabinets. And each year, approximately 50,000 children under age 5 end up in emergency departments because of accidental poisoning.

## A better option

Ward says that one of the biggest obstacles to using

of identifying hazardous or problematic elements in the waste stream and working with the producer of those products to develop programs so they're managed more responsibly at the end of their life."

To find a med bin near you, visit [www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org).



## WHAT GOES IN THE BINS?

- ▶ Prescription medications
- ▶ Over-the-counter medications
- ▶ Medicated ointments and lotions
- ▶ Pet medications



If possible, transfer pills into a zipped plastic bag before placing in the bin.



Leave medicated ointments and lotions tightly sealed in the original containers.



Obscure any personal information.



## WHAT DOESN'T GO IN THE BIN:

- ▶ Cannabis
- ▶ Illegal controlled substances (heroin, LSD, etc.)
- ▶ Medical sharps and needles
- ▶ Auto-injectors (such as EpiPen®)
- ▶ Iodine-containing medications
- ▶ Mercury thermometers
- ▶ Radiopharmaceuticals
- ▶ Chemotherapy or cytotoxic medications
- ▶ Compressed cylinders or aerosols (such as asthma inhalers)
- ▶ Vitamins and dietary supplements
- ▶ Business medical waste (waste from hospitals, clinics or medical, dental and veterinary practices)

# WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH UNUSED



## Don't store them at home



- ✘ Those drugs may be taken by young children
- ✘ Or stolen by teens, family members, or visitors
- ✘ Which can lead to accidental overdoses



## Don't flush them down the toilet



- ✘ Waste water treatment plants cannot remove drugs
- ✘ Leading to contamination of our streams, rivers, and lakes
- ✘ Which is harmful to animals, plants, and people



## DON'T LEAVE DRUGS FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE

More than  $\frac{1}{2}$



More than half of all American adults take at least one prescription medication daily, with even more medications prescribed that are never taken.

7 out of 10



In California, 7 out of 10 opioid-related overdose deaths are due to prescription drugs.

# DRUGS?

Putting your unused or unwanted medications in a drug take-back bin is the safest and most environmentally protective way to dispose of them.



## Don't throw them in the trash



- ✘ These drugs may be taken out of the trash by others
- ✘ Which can lead to illegal use or sale
- ✘ Which fuels the opioid epidemic



## Drop them off in a drug take-back bin



- ✔ You can discard of your drugs safely, conveniently, and anonymously
- ✔ They are completely destroyed through thermal destruction
- ✔ Therefore, they will not enter the environment

## 9.9 million

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 9.9 million Americans misuse controlled prescription drugs each year. The study showed the majority of abused prescription drugs were obtained from family and friends, often from the home medicine cabinet and without their knowledge.

## 9,000



Nearly 9,000 emergency room visits in California annually are attributed to opioid drug overdoses.

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ONE BIN AT A TIME

Sonoma County has been a forerunner in drug take-back programs

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

California leads the nation in addressing issues that are vital to the public health and safety, and the environment. One crucial piece is the California Statewide Drug Take-Back Program, funded by the California Department of Health Care Services and administered by the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC).

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

Residents of counties across the state can anonymously deposit unused and expired medications into the bins, rather than endanger the environment and possibly lives by stockpiling them at home, flushing them down the toilet, or throwing them in the trash. The discarded drugs are incinerated at waste-to-energy plants.

In one way or another, thousands of people touch this chain of events, including Lisa Steinman, Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst for the Sonoma County Department of Health Services in Santa Rosa.

Steinman has worked on Sonoma County's Safe Medicine Disposal Program (SMDP) since its inception in 2007. It provides county residents

Steinman says. "Together with all of our partners, we've created a really robust program that gets a lot of buy-in (through) outreach and educational programs."

Currently, the county offers a combination of 25 take-back bins and mail-back envelope distribution sites. The mail-back model allows people to place unwanted

*"There's a lot of support for our programs and definitely a need for more bins."*

Lisa Steinman

Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst, Sonoma County Department of Health Services

"with safe and convenient methods for disposal of unwanted medications in an effort to help prevent overdoses and to protect the environment," she says. To date, it has collected nearly 140,000 pounds of medications.

"CPSC has been with us throughout SMDP's implementation,"

medications in prepaid envelopes and mail them to participating vendors for disposal.

SMDP's collaborative partnership includes environmentally invested groups such as Zero Waste Sonoma and the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA).



Lisa Steinman has helped bring easy disposal of unwanted medications to Sonoma County residents.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA STEINMAN

The project is "a high-priority" for RRWA's board of directors in particular, as "it's comprised of elected officials from all the cities in the county," says RRWA executive director Andy Rodgers. "They know their constituents want to have a safe, convenient way to dispose of their unwanted medications."

"There's a lot of support for our programs and definitely a need for more bins," Steinman says.

SMDP will transition into a comprehensive statewide take-back program in the near future, Steinman says.

For more information:  
[www.safemedicinedisposal.org](http://www.safemedicinedisposal.org),  
[www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org).



## FIGHT THE OPIOID CRISIS

**128** Americans die every day from an opioid overdose, says the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

**45%** of drug overdoses are estimated to be opioid-related. In California, that's more than **2,400 deaths** each year.

**Millions** of Americans are addicted to opioids, such as hydrocodone, morphine, and oxycodone. Abuse of these powerful painkillers takes a toll that goes far beyond individuals and their families.

**\$78.5 billion** represents the annual economic burden of opioid abuse, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This includes health care, treatment, law enforcement, and lost productivity.

Many people who misuse opioids get them from a friend or relative — often without that person's knowledge. By removing the risk of unused opioids in your home, you can help address the devastating opioid crisis affecting so many American families.

Proper disposal of unused prescription opioids saves lives.

# KEY TO SUCCESS: SIMPLE, SAFE, CONVENIENT

Commonly asked questions about pharmaceutical  
take-back bins

BY ANNE STOKES

Medication take-back bins provide a safe and responsible way to dispose of unused and expired medications. This secure disposal option keeps medications from polluting local watersheds and can help prevent both intentional misuse and accidental poisonings.

The bins are a simple and safe solution to a common problem. "They are convenient for residents to dispose of medicine," says Jennifer Lombari, general manager of Mendo Recycle. "Having accessible bins promotes proper disposal rather than putting them in the waste stream or being flushed down the toilet."

Here are more answers to frequently asked questions about take-back bins:

## How do medication take-back bins benefit the communities they're in?

Take-back bins provide convenient and secure disposal options for unused or expired medications. In the past, users were encouraged to flush medications down the drain or throw them away in the trash, both of which can contribute to pollution. Stockpiling medications in the home can also contribute to intentional misuse or accidental poisonings.

## What can be disposed of in the bins?

Bins accept prescription and over-the-counter medications, medical patches, as well as pet medications and medicated ointments and lotions tightly sealed in their original containers. Disposal requirements are posted at each bin location.

*"Having accessible bins promotes proper disposal."*

*Jennifer Lombari  
General manager, Mendo Recycle*

## What materials cannot be disposed of in the bins?

Illegal controlled substances such as marijuana, heroin or LSD for example, cannot be disposed of in the bins. For

safety reasons, medical sharps and needles, compressed cylinders such as asthma inhalers, chemotherapy or radiopharmaceuticals should also not be disposed of in bins. Medical devices such as thermometers also cannot be disposed of in the bins. Sites will not be held responsible for materials deposited into bins.

## What locations are suitable to host a take-back bin?

Pharmacies, hospitals with pharmacies, and law enforcement locations are suitable locations as they can provide proper management and security for materials.

## What are sites responsible for handling?

Sites are responsible for maintaining bins and ensuring they are securely located inside. Once full, sites are responsible for scheduling material pick ups. They also are responsible for answering questions from

customers about what materials may be dropped in the bins. Once the bin is full, site staff is responsible for removing and sealing the package and liner for pick up.

Host sites may also be responsible for a monthly service fee for the collection and proper disposal of materials. Although costs may vary depending on a number of factors, the value of the ongoing servicing is approximately \$165 a month.

## Is there any assistance available for host sites?

The California Product Stewardship Council is available for technical assistance, including initial bin set-up and getting configured in the system for scheduling material pick-ups.

*For more information, visit [www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org).*



Justin Weiss, CPSC Senior Associate, stands next to a bin installed as part of the California Drug Take-Back Program.

PHOTO BY BRAD SANBORN, CPSC SENIOR ASSOCIATE

For more information on what types of medications can be accepted and for take-back bin locations, visit [www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org).

# HOW YOU CAN HELP



## WHY MEDICATION TAKE-BACK BINS WORK

“These take-back bins are a **safe and convenient way for people to dispose of their unused medications, which will help fight prescription drug abuse and keep pharmaceuticals out of our water supply.** It’s a win for public health, the environment, and consumers. As the author of SB 212, which created the first in the nation statewide drug and needle take-back program funded by the producers of these products, I am thrilled that millions of Californians throughout the state will be able to easily dispose of their unused medications.”

**Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson**  
*Santa Barbara*

“I really appreciate the work of the California Product Stewardship Council in helping deploy and promote the use of these bins. ... **They do really important work of identifying hazardous or problematic elements in the waste stream and working with the producer of those products to develop programs** so they’re managed more responsibly at the end of their life.”

**Tedd Ward**  
*Director, Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority*



## Where to find a medication take-back bin?

Many independent pharmacies, hospital pharmacies, and chain pharmacies now include medication take-back bins. Other non-medical facilities, such as law enforcement offices, also offer medication take-back bins for the public to use.

To find the nearest bin to where you live, use this interactive map at:  
[www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org)



## How does it work?

### Follow these easy steps:

- 1 At home, if possible, remove pills and other solid medications from their containers and consolidate in a clear plastic zipper bag. Keep cream medication tightly sealed in their original containers. (NOTE: Keep medications in their child-proof container until just prior to drop off.)
- 2 Remove, mark out, or otherwise obscure personal information from solid and cream medication containers to protect your personal information. Recycle containers for solid medications in your household recycling, if applicable. See your local waste and recycling services provider’s website.
- 3 Bring zipper bag and any creams to a bin location and place in the bin. It’s that easy!



## Questions?

🌐 [www.takebackdrugs.org](http://www.takebackdrugs.org) @ [info@calpsc.org](mailto:info@calpsc.org) ☎️ 916.706.3420



**California Product Stewardship Council**

1822 21st St., Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95811

[www.calpsc.org](http://www.calpsc.org)

[facebook.com/CaliforniaPSC/](https://facebook.com/CaliforniaPSC/)



**Department of Health Care Services**

1500 Capitol Ave.  
Sacramento, CA 95814

[www.dhcs.ca.gov](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov)



**California Opioid Safety Network**

555 12th St., 10th Floor  
Oakland, CA 94607

510-285-5586

[www.californiaopioidsafetynetwork.org](http://www.californiaopioidsafetynetwork.org)

