

Drug Diversion and Abuse: Project Drug Drop

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Published Online: June 15, 2010 - 4:08:14 PM (CDT)

The National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators had developed a new Web site to help facilitate prescription take-back programs, in which law enforcement must be involved.



One of the positive emerging trends in the field of preventing prescription drug abuse has been the interest by law enforcement, community groups, and the general public in providing a venue for individuals who want to rid themselves of unneeded or expired medication.

Because it has become clear over the past several years that a definite source of drug diversion exists in our residences, good-meaning citizens and community groups have tried to provide an outlet for individuals to discard these medications. This has spurred many well-intentioned prescription drug take-back programs; however, some of them have not been carried out in compliance with the law, opening these groups up to potential liability.

Most of you have seen me refer to the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI; www.naddi.org) over the years. Officials from the organization have constructed a Web site specifically designed to assist law enforcement and/ or community groups in setting up a viable and legal prescription drug take-back program. Lisa McElhaney, NADDI vice president, and NADDI's new Webmaster, Jason Doerman, teamed together to produce www.projectdrugdrop.com.

McElhaney's vast experience in conducting several of these programs in and around Broward County, Florida, was put to good use, as she crafted the text and then collaborated with Doerman to produce the graphics. The Web site also provides a calendar that lists specific drug take-back programs across the country by date and location. We encourage anyone who is engaged in one of these programs to send us the date/time/location, and we will advertise it on this Web site.

The "About the Program" link gives a brief overview of the problem with prescription medication sitting in your home that is unused or has expired. The safety and environmental issues are also explained in this portion of the Web site for those who are less informed of the issues surrounding prescription drug abuse.

The site has a toolkit for both law enforcement and the community. The community toolkit provides several resources on the Web, and the law enforcement program provides PowerPoint programs, procedures for disposing of controlled substances, and a community brochure that can be downloaded and customized with your information.

If one message needs repeating when the community attempts to conduct one of these programs, it is that law enforcement must be involved! Local and state law enforcement agencies handle all types of evidence on a daily basis in the United States. The prescription drug take-back program is no different, with the drugs being accepted by law enforcement as abandoned property. Law enforcement must be present and accept the medications in order to maintain the all-important chain of custody.

Law enforcement then handles these drugs as they would any other abandoned property—which includes sealing it up properly and securing it in their property room until a destruction order can be obtained from a

local judge. Once this is obtained, the drugs, through standard procedure, are destroyed properly at an Environmental Protection Agency–approved facility that the agency uses on a regular basis when destroying a variety of controlled substances (both prescription and illegal street drugs).

Hopefully this new Web site that NADDI is unveiling will be of great assistance to community groups and law enforcement across the nation. With all of the misinformation associated with these programs, the goal here is to help facilitate the formation of a good service to the public, while doing it in accordance with all the laws and regulations that surround these take-back programs.

Cmdr Burke is commander of the Warren County, Ohio, drug task force and retired commander of the Cincinnati Police Pharmaceutical Diversion Squad. Cmdr John Burke Project Drug Drop Involving Law Enforcement in "Take Back" Programs Legal focus Drug Diversion & Abuse Cmdr Burke is a 40-year veteran of law enforcement and the current president of the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators. He can be reached by e-mail at burke@choice.net, via the Web site www.rxdiversion.com, or by phone at 513-336-0070.
