

# Safe Medicine Disposal for ME Program

Based on figures from the National Unused and Expired Medicine Registry, as many as 40% of prescription medicines are never used. Such medicines represent an expensive waste of healthcare resources and a potential environmental and safety hazard.

## Unused Prescription Medicine is: An Environmental and Health Hazard

- Over half of Americans dispose of unwanted prescription medicine in the trash, one-third put it down the sink or toilet, and *only 1.4% return it to a collection facility*.<sup>1</sup>
- Prescription medicine then enters the water through disposal down a drain or from the leaching or leaking of the drugs from landfills.<sup>2</sup>
- Over 80 pharmaceuticals of various prescription drug classes have been found in treated sewage, surface water, and ground water throughout the country.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies have found that exposure to medicine in water has been linked to serious reproductive side effects in fish, and the full effect on humans is currently unknown.<sup>4</sup>

## A Danger to Children and Pets

- Children and pets can accidentally get poisoned by unused prescription medicine found in the home.
- In the US, medicine in the home accounts for more accidental poisonings than any other product.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly 2% of children ages 12-13 intentionally misuse prescription medicine.<sup>6</sup> Accessibility to the medicine is likely a contributing factor to this growing trend.<sup>7</sup>

## A Danger to Older Adults

- Older adults make up only 13% of the population, but fill one-third of all prescriptions. This makes them susceptible to intentional or accidental medicine misuse, dependence, and addiction.<sup>8</sup>
- Diversion and theft of prescription medicine is currently at very high levels, and older adults may be particularly at risk.<sup>9</sup>

## A Danger to Communities

- In 2002 in Maine, almost *90% of all drug deaths* were caused by prescription medicine.<sup>10</sup>
- The non-medical use of prescription medicine, among US residents ages 12 and older, is more common than the use of any illicit drug except marijuana.<sup>11</sup>
- Maine DEA arrests for prescription medicine misuse have increased dramatically to 16% of all arrests.<sup>12</sup>

## A Waste of Valuable Healthcare Dollars

- One small study conservatively estimates the cost of wasted prescription medicine by adults ages 65 and older to be *over one billion dollars annually*.<sup>13</sup>
- With healthcare costs rising at 3 times the rate of inflation, this waste will only continue to grow.<sup>14</sup>

For more information contact Safe Medicine Disposal for ME

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