


# TWO LARGEST U.S. COUNTIES WITH MORE THAN 15 MILLION PEOPLE CONSIDER MEDICATION TAKE-BACK PROGRAMS

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Los Angeles County in California and Cook County in Illinois, representing more than 15 million residents, are considering ordinances that establish sustainably financed medication take-back programs to provide residents with a convenient way to safely dispose of unwanted medications. Los Angeles is also including needles. The ordinances intend to help prevent medicines (and needles in LA) from entering the environment, reduce their availability for drug abuse and misuse, and reduce injuries associated with needle sticks. "I applaud Los Angeles and Cook counties for recognizing the importance of implementing safe medication take-back programs," said Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director of the National Stewardship Action Council, which has been working with both counties. "Five counties and the City of San Francisco in California as well as King County in Washington have passed ordinances with the objective of having a fair sharing of responsibility between government and industry. Now we are seeing jurisdictions outside of the west coast tackle this issue."

Today, the flushing of medications contributes to pharmaceutical pollution in the environment. The amount of leftover and expired medications in American homes is significant – an estimated 30-40 percent goes unused. Medicine take-back programs are the most cost-effective and sustainable way to dispose of unwanted medications. "I am very pleased to see a groundswell of local interest in developing safe and secure take-back programs that protect our public health and the environment," said Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara), who previously authored state legislation, which stalled, to create a statewide drug take-back program in California. "I commend Los Angeles and Cook counties for joining us in the fight to prevent prescription drug abuse and keep our water clean."

In fact, NSAC facilitated a letter that was signed by more than 100 individuals and organizations in January asking the Food and Drug Administration to end its "flush list" to keep medications out of the water system. Because a safe medication and needle take-back program is a proven solution, more and more cities are drafting ordinances to provide a sustainable funding source by requiring pharmaceutical and needle manufacturers design and fund a convenient and safe take-back programs that would include an education component to ensure that the public is aware of their collection options. In addition, stakeholders such as Walgreens are stepping up to the plate.

Walgreens recently announced <http://calpsc.org/mobius/cpsc-content/uploads/2016/02/Walgreens-SafeMedicationDisposal-press-release-final-2-9->

[16.pdf](#)> they would be the first national pharmacy retail chain in the U.S. to put medicine collection bins in 500 of their stores, starting in California. They should be applauded for leading the retailers in sharing responsibility for a safe take-back program.

Alameda County in California was the first in the nation to implement a take-back ordinance in 2012. It was strongly supported by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. who also strongly supports the Los Angeles and Cook Counties' ordinances. Mr. Kennedy said, "As President of Waterkeeper Alliance, I am a firm supporter of extended producer responsibility (EPR) as a concept that addresses multiple issues including reducing waste, improving water quality, and protecting public and environmental health. These ordinances are built on an EPR model that will provide safe and convenient options for disposal of unused drugs, and most importantly, ensure public safety and protect water quality and aquatic life from pharmaceuticals that are improperly disposed of."

However, while this type of program is no different than programs drug producers help fund and operate in countries all over the world, Mexico, Portugal, Brazil and even Colombia, they continue to oppose proposed ordinances including taking the Alameda ordinance to the U.S. Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court denied PhRMA's request to hear their case in May of 2015, paving the way for other communities in the nation to adopt ordinances of their own. All ordinances to date have passed unanimously indicating the extent of local support. "We are very proud of the ordinance and defending it to the U.S. Supreme Court, giving every county the right to take action to promote public safety through protecting public and environmental health," said Supervisor Nate Miley who led the call for the ordinance in Alameda. "We hope Los Angeles and Cook counties stay the course to have the industry offer the same services provided to our neighboring countries to the north and south."

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