



# Russian River Watershed Association

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## RRWA Environmental Column – June 2016 Safe Medicine Disposal Program Update

How do you dispose of your old prescription and over the counter medicines? Not only are there environmental concerns associated with throwing medicine in the trash and flushing them down the toilet, letting them accumulate at home creates opportunities for those medicines getting into the wrong hands. It is for these reasons that the regional membership of the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA) enacted the FREE Safe Medicine Disposal Program to safely take back and properly dispose of unwanted medicines.

The Safe Medicine Disposal Program is a partnership between local agencies, pharmacies, and law enforcement offices to safely dispose of unwanted medications, prevent overdoses, and protect the environment. Residents of Sonoma and Mendocino Counties can drop off their unwanted medications at 24 free, discreet, and anonymous [medicine take-back locations](#). These locations accept prescription and over-the-counter pills and capsules, liquid medications, veterinary medications, vitamins, supplements, homeopathic remedies, medical patches, inhalers, and medical samples. Since 2007, the Safe Medicine Disposal Program has collected over 100,000 pounds of unwanted medicines. For more information on the Safe Medicine Disposal Program locations, click [here](#).

Syringes and needles (also known as sharps) and controlled substances have fewer drop-off locations due to safety and regulatory concerns, and are not accepted at many of the Safe Medicine Disposal drop-off locations. The DEA Office of Diversion Control has a [tool](#) for finding controlled substance disposal locations. Syringes and needles are required to be in sealed sharps containers. Waste pharmaceuticals and sharps disposals are offered for residents only (not businesses).

The Safe Medicine Disposal Program has had many successes, but there are still many hurdles to clear. The California Board of Pharmacies regulations for prescription drug take-back programs are currently being revised in a manner that may disincentivize pharmacy participation in take-back programs. In addition, the Safe Medicine Disposal Program, like many in the United States, is funded solely by local government agencies. Without a regulatory requirement, the producers of medicines are not responsible for funding the disposal of unused medications.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a concept that helps clear many of the hurdles of medicine take-back programs by requiring medicine producers to design, manage, and finance programs for end-of-life management of their products and packaging, as a condition of sale. Alameda County was the first county in California and the country to pass EPR legislation requiring that producers share in the responsibility for safe medicine disposal. EPR legislation has gained popularity in the United States since the U.S. Supreme Court denied a challenge against Alameda County's EPR ordinance in 2015. Currently, RRWA and its Safe Medicine Program partners are tracking current and developing EPR ordinances in California and evaluating opportunities to address the long-term needs for safe medicine disposal in our communities. Fortunately, our program can reference data from EPR programs that have been successful for decades throughout Europe and Canada.



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Moreover, Sonoma County is working to make it easier for residents to safely dispose of unwanted medication and needles. To do this, your input is needed. Please fill out this short 3-4 minute survey to let us know which disposal options work best for you and to share your thoughts on this issue. Your answers are anonymous. Who do you think should pay for the safe disposal of medication? What do you currently do with your unwanted medication? Tell us at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SonomaMedsSharps>.

*This article was authored by Nazareth Tesfai of the Sonoma County Water Agency, on behalf of RRWA. RRWA ([www.rwatershed.org](http://www.rwatershed.org)) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.*