



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 508-3670 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – April 2024 Safe Medicine Disposal Stewardship Programs



Have you ever opened your medicine cabinet, picked up a bottle, and realized it has been expired for years or that you had more than you would ever need? Have you wondered how you can properly dispose of your expired or leftover medicine?

California now has an industry-run statewide stewardship program that provides safe and convenient disposal options for pharmaceutical waste at no cost to the consumer. The public is encouraged to take advantage of pharmaceutical take-back

collection programs that accept prescription or over-the-counter drugs, as these programs offer a safe and environmentally conscious way to dispose of unwanted medicines. When flushed down the drain, some medications are not completely removed by certain kinds of wastewater treatment plants. Proper disposal of unused medications helps protect the environment and keeps them out of the wrong hands.

For the past fifteen years, RRWA provided safe medicine disposal to Sonoma and Mendocino County residents, free of charge through the [Safe Medicine Disposal Program](#). Since 2003, RRWA and local government partners have managed numerous medicine drop-off locations for residents across the two counties, and developed education and outreach campaigns to make sure everyone knew of this safe and free way to clear out their medicine cabinets. Since 2012 alone, RRWA's efforts helped collect over one million pounds of pharmaceuticals! These efforts helped our community and environment, but locations and reach were limited by available local funding and site participation.



Now, thanks to the implementation of statewide legislation that significantly moved forward in 2023, Sonoma and Mendocino County residents have many more opportunities to safely dispose of their expired or unwanted medications. California's Pharmaceutical and Sharps Waste Stewardship Law, Senate Bill 212, mandated that pharmaceutical manufacturers and producers pay for the collection, transportation, and disposal of their products at the end of their lifecycle. SB 212 created Pharmaceutical Stewardship Organizations that partner with pharmacies, hospitals and clinics to provide free and convenient medication collection bins and medication mail-back envelopes across California. SB 212 lifts the financial burden and time needed from local agencies, like RRWA, to manage safe disposal drop-offs, saving taxpayer money and local resources. SB 212 also promotes the circular economy by mandating that manufacturers consider end-of-life disposal in the design and management of their products.

With the rollout of SB 212, safe and free medicine disposal options are available at the same place where you get your medicines – your neighborhood pharmacy! Large chain stores like CVS, Safeway, Lucky Pharmacy, and Rite Aid are participating in this new stewardship program along with local pharmacies to provide safe drop-off of medications at the same place you pick up prescriptions. There are also more mail-back options available.



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Some local law enforcement agencies also provide medication collection bins and mail-back envelopes for residents. Residents can also dispose of medications, including controlled substances, at special one-day collection events sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in partnership with local law enforcement agencies. **The next National Prescription Drug Take Back Day is Saturday, April 27, 2024 from 10am-2pm. Visit [DEA Take Back Day](#) in April for location information on the upcoming event.**



SB 212 also includes provisions for the collection and disposal of home-generated sharps and needles. California residents can order free sharps mail-back kits with containers through the participating stewardship organizations.

MED-Project and The Drug Takeback Solutions Foundation, the program operators for California's Pharmaceutical and Sharps Waste Stewardship Programs, have worked together to create coordinated websites to provide ultimate users with access to statewide pharmaceutical and home-generated sharps waste disposal options. Each website provides ultimate users with disposal information, including links for ordering free mail-back materials and identifying drop-off locations for unwanted medicine.

Visit MedTakeBackCalifornia.org or call (844) 4-TAKE-BACK

Visit SharpsTakeBackCalifornia.org or call (844) 4-TAKE-BACK

In Sonoma County, Sharps can also be collected as Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) at local [HHW collection facilities](#) and [collection events](#).

RRWA and the local Safe Medicine Disposal Program government partners will continue to educate the general public regarding the importance of properly disposing of unwanted medicines and will direct residents to properly dispose of their medicines and sharps through California's Pharmaceutical and Sharps Waste Stewardship Program's medications bins and free mail-back envelope services. For local safe medicine disposal related information visit: [Safe Medicine Disposal Program](#).

This article was authored by the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services, Environmental Health and the RRWA Safe Medicine Disposal Subcommittee – Operations Group, on behalf of RRWA. [RRWA](#) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, habitat restoration, and watershed enhancement.