



Prescription Drug Disposal: Opportunities for the City of Seattle

Safe Disposal of Unused Prescription Drugs Provides a Dose of Community Prevention Against Drug Abuse

Drug abuse is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive and evidence-based public health approach. One component of a comprehensive public health approach to addressing drug abuse is the safe disposal of unused prescription drugs. Safe disposal of unused prescription drugs, especially opioid pain relievers, reduces the risk of nonmedical use that might lead to drug abuse, including heroin addiction.



In Seattle, there are currently no facilities that will accept and safely dispose of unused controlled substances, including prescription opioids such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, and codeine. A new program in King County beginning in June 2016 will allow controlled substances to be collected at Seattle Police Department precincts and pharmacies.

A growing number of police departments in King County offer secure drop-boxes where residents can safely dispose of unused prescription drugs. The Seattle Police Department (SPD) does not currently offer this service. However, there is potential for SPD to participate in a new program in King County that will offer free pick-up and disposal of unused drugs from police departments and local pharmacies.

On April 4, 2016, the Seattle City Council unanimously passed Resolution 31654 expressing the City's support for an effective, countywide safe prescription drug disposal program, including controlled substances, and requesting local pharmacies and the Seattle Police Department to install drug disposal drop-boxes across the city:

<http://seattle.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2598093&GUID=9551D2DD-ODDA-46AF-A2CF-7617D347C467>

Evidence Links Heroin Use with Previous Use of Opioid Pain Relievers

In June 2015, the University of Washington (UW) Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute reported that drug-caused deaths involving heroin and/or methamphetamine peaked in King County in 2014, including a 58% increase in heroin deaths. See:

http://adai.washington.edu/pubs/cewg/Drug%20Trends_2014_final.pdf

Although the UW report indicates that deaths from prescription opioids have declined in King County, their use is linked to the initiation of heroin use. A 2013 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicated that four out of five recent heroin users (79.5%) previously used opioid pain relievers such as oxycodone. See:

<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/DR006/DR006/nonmedical-pain-reliever-use-2013.htm>

Research suggests that these individuals switched to heroin because it is less expensive on the black market than opioid pain relievers. Further, adolescents and young adults who experiment with nonmedical use of opioid pain relievers are most likely to obtain them from friends and family members who had received a prescription. See: <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122957>

Safe Disposal of Prescription Drugs – A Community Prevention Strategy

Drug abuse prevention requires a comprehensive public health response that includes involvement from physicians, social service providers, government, and the community. A recommended community-based strategy for drug abuse prevention is the use of prescription drug disposal programs that allow people to safely dispose of controlled substances, such as oxycodone, to prevent nonmedical use and misuse by others. As with any community-based prevention strategy, prescription drug disposal programs should be designed to be culturally relevant and to reduce barriers for marginalized populations, including limited English speakers. See: <http://www.ihsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-drug-safety-and-effectiveness/opioid-epidemic-town-hall-2015/2015-prescription-opioid-epidemic-report.pdf>



Prescription Drug Disposal Drop-Boxes: How Do They Work?

Many pharmacies in the Seattle area offer drug disposal drop-boxes for unused vitamins, over-the-counter medicines, and some prescription drugs. Currently, controlled substances are not accepted by pharmacies for disposal. Controlled substances are drugs with a high potential for abuse including amphetamines, Valium, Ritalin, morphine, methadone and oxycodone.



Many law enforcement agencies in Washington state have set up drug disposal drop-boxes for use by residents (participating King County police agencies are listed on the right). These police departments generally accept prescription drugs, including controlled substances, inhalers, unused epi-pens, and pet medications.

Residents may drop off their medications directly in the drop boxes during normal business hours in

sealed clear zip-top plastic bags; any personal information, such as name or prescription number, may be crossed out.

Police Departments in King County Offering Safe Drug Disposal

Currently, the Seattle Police Department does not accept controlled substances for disposal at its locations. However a growing number of police departments in King County are offering safe disposal of controlled substances. These police departments include:

- Auburn
- Bothell
- Burien
- Issaquah
- Kenmore
- Lake Forest Park
- Maple Valley
- Sammamish
- Snoqualmie
- Woodinville

In Woodinville, for example, the drop-box (pictured left) is located in the lobby of its City Hall/ Police Headquarters. It is bolted to the floor and locked when no staff are present. In 2015, the Woodinville Police Department collected and incinerated 729 pounds of drugs from its drop-box.

New King County Program for Safe Drug Disposal Provides Opportunities for City of Seattle

In June 2016, King County will implement a new program for the safe disposal of prescription and nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines; medicine sold in any form, both brand name and generic; and legally-prescribed controlled substances such as OxyContin, Vicodin, Valium, Ritalin, and stimulants. King County will pay for the drop-boxes which can be located at police stations or pharmacies. Stewardship organizations, funded by a number of pharmaceutical companies, will provide free-of-charge installation of the drop-boxes, staff training, and pick-up and disposal of the drugs. See: <http://kingcountysecuremedicinereturn.org/>

King County welcomes the partnership of the City of Seattle in this new program. This might include:

- Siting drug disposal drop-boxes at each of the Seattle Police Department precincts;
- Seattle Police Department participation in drug take-back events in the community;
- City of Seattle input on and partnership with plans for community engagement.

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