

Editorial: Dispose of unused drugs Saturday

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Do you have some old prescription medicine tucked away in the bathroom cabinet or maybe toward the back of a kitchen shelf? If so, you have a great opportunity Saturday to dispose of that medicine safely when Project Rx returns for the fifth time to our community.

Old prescriptions medicines are dangerous if they fall into the hands of people who could abuse them or take them by mistake. And if those old drugs are flushed down the toilet or washed down the kitchen sink, they can make their way into our water supply and cause all sorts of environmental problems.

Project Rx is a way to keep that old or unused medicine out of the wrong hands and out of our rivers. It stands to reason that this forward-looking project is sponsored by the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, Greenville Family Partnership, Renewable Water Resources, Greenville Technical College and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. For more information go to www.ariverremedy.org.

Several local groups came together in early 2010 to create this project crafted around the idea that people need a way to properly dispose of medication. This project aimed at "protecting our rivers and our residents" started in the fall of 2010, and since then has returned each spring and fall. To date, a total of 5,537 pounds of medication has been turned in at the four events; more than half of that, 2,824 pounds, was turned in this spring.

This Saturday, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., any citizen can bring old or unused medication to three convenient drive-through locations: Greenville County Medical Society at 1395 South Church Street, McAlister Square at 225 South Pleasantburg Drive and St. Francis Millennium near CU-ICAR at 2 Innovation Drive. Other convenient locations in Greenville County include Travelers Rest City Hall, the Simpsonville Police Department, McKleskey Todd Pharmacy on Main Street in Greer, the Greenville Law Enforcement Center and Fountain Inn Activity Center. Another dozen locations are sprinkled throughout the Upstate and they can be found at www.ariverremedy.org.

People can drop off their drugs at the collections site for free and they can remain anonymous. The sites will take unwanted or expired prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements, and veterinary medicine from households only. Sharps or syringes will not be accepted. The organizers said that participants should leave the name of the drug visible on the medication labels and use a black permanent marker to eliminate any personal information.

Writing Sunday in an oped published in this newspaper, Greenville County Sheriff Steve Loftis said that Project Rx is keeping "hundreds of thousands of pills (from) making their way to our streets, into the hands of criminals, or, more importantly, into the hands of our children and youth. Our rivers and streams are better protected and the drinking water coming into our homes is safer because of these events."

As Sheriff Loftis pointed out, the abuse of prescription painkillers costs our society over \$70 billion a year in lost productivity and the expenses borne by the criminal justice and healthcare systems, according to a 2007 Coalition Against Insurance Fraud study.

The problems associated with abuse of such drugs also are found in Greenville because overdoses of painkillers aren't limited to just other parts of the country. As the sheriff noted, our Coroner's Office has seen an increase in the rate of overdose deaths where prescription drugs played a role.

Misuse of prescription drugs can lead to a life time of problems and can even result in death. Young people can

find such powerful drugs in their parents' cabinets or mom's purse. Those medications, even those disposed of in the garbage can, can be distributed or even sold to other children.

On the environmental front, traces of prescription drugs are becoming more common in drinking water systems around the country. A 2008 study by The Associated Press found pharmaceuticals that include "antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and sex hormones" in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans.

Old or unused medications can do much harm if disposed of improperly. It's easy to get rid of them safely and Upstate residents should do just that Saturday.