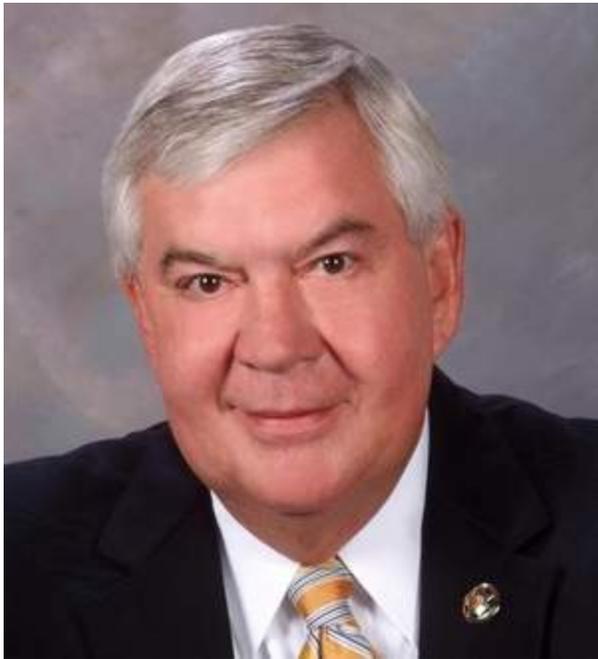


## Dispose of unused drugs safely at Project Rx

Sep 23

greenvilleonline.com



### GUEST COLUMN

Sheriff Steve Loftis is a 38-year veteran of law enforcement and has served as sheriff of Greenville County for the past 10 years.

Nearly two years ago I wrote about an imminent problem facing our community, that of prescription drug misuse and a new program the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with other concerned organizations, was going to be providing to help the community dispose of unused medications. The program is called Project Rx. I am happy that the community has supported the Project Rx partnership and we will continue, with our fifth collection event to be held on Saturday, Sept. 29.

Project Rx, along with a partnership with the Drug Enforcement Agency with their collection efforts, has helped properly dispose of over 5,000 pounds of medication from the Upstate communities since the first collection in November 2010. That is hundreds of thousands of pills not 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, I am proud of our community for supporting this effort, but also know that much more needs to be done to protect our families, community and environment.

Many of the problems in our community from prescription drug abuse remain. Drug dealers still sell pills in our streets at upwards of \$50 a pill and our youth continue to abuse them by taking them from mom's purse or grandma's kitchen.

According to a 2007 Coalition Against Insurance Fraud study, the abuse of prescription painkillers, one of the most abused prescription drugs and a variant of heroin, costs our economy over \$70 billion a year in lost productivity and costs to the criminal justice and healthcare systems. Painkiller overdoses tripled between 1999 and 2008 and approximately one-half of emergency room visits in 2009 were due to the misuse or abuse of prescription medications. We are not immune here in Greenville County, as the Coroner's Office noted an increase in the rate of overdose deaths where prescription drugs played a role. This is unacceptable, as these deaths are completely preventable.

Unfortunately, however, the misuse and abuse of prescription has permeated our society. According to the Centers for Disease Control in 2010, 12 million Americans ages 12 and over reported the nonmedical use of prescription pain medicine during the previous year. Among 12th grade youth in Greenville County, 27 percent reported having misused prescription medications during their lifetime. Further, over 14 percent of these youth also reported having misused prescription medication in the last 30 days.

Such misuse of prescriptions can lead to a lifetime of problems including crime and addiction, and, if the statistics are right, eventually lead to their death. Parents and all segments of our community need to let our youth know that prescriptions can be dangerous when not used properly under the care of a physician. Another way is to continue

supporting and utilizing programs such as Project Rx by going through your medicine cabinets, purses, kitchen cupboards or anywhere you may store medications and bringing your unused medications to this event so they may be disposed of safely.

The collection sites offer free and anonymous acceptance of unused or expired prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements, and veterinary medicine from households only. Sharps or syringes will not be accepted. Participants should leave the name of the drug visible on medication labels and use a black permanent marker to eliminate any personal information.

The Project Rx community taskforce is led by a community collaboration of Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Greenville Family Partnership, Greenville Technical College, and Renewable Water Resources, in partnership with the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Supporting organizations include Carolinas Institute for Community Policing, Greenville County Medical Society, The Greenville News, Greenville Journal, Greenville Water, Indexx, Presbyterian College, SC Pharmacy Association, Upstate Forever, Upstate Parent and Whole Foods Market. These organizations support the Project Rx event with financial contributions and in-kind services.

For more information, visit the Project Rx website, [www.aRiverRemedy.org](http://www.aRiverRemedy.org) or call 864-467-4099.