

Take your old drugs to Project Rx

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It's time to clean out bathroom cabinets and kitchen shelves, and get those old, unused medications to a safe place. Saturday is the sixth Project Rx event in the Upstate, and it gives people a wonderful opportunity to dispose of medicine safely.

Old medications often sit around many homes, and they are dangerous if they fall into the hands of people who could abuse them or take them by mistake. Also, the temptation can be great to just flush those old prescription drugs down the toilet or dump them in the kitchen sink, and if that happens those drugs can find their way into our water supply and cause many environmental problems.

Several groups came together in early 2010 to start Project Rx: A River Remedy. Since then the event has taken place each spring and fall, and because of it a total of 6,756 pounds of prescription and over-the-counter medications have been disposed of properly.

Project Rx will be Saturday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at various locations throughout the Upstate. The planning partners for this event include Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Greenville Family Partnership, Greenville Technical College, Renewable Water Resources, Carolinas Institute for Community Policing and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The partners join in this event for various reasons that fit their core mission such as protecting the environment or preventing drug abuse.

The partners have done a great job promoting Project Rx since it started in 2010, and the fruits of their labor can be seen in some impressive numbers. In 2010 about 220 pounds of medications were collected, and two events later in October 2011 the event was collecting 1,541 pounds. There's an opportunity to collect that much or more this Saturday, and if the event is successful that will mean pounds of old or unused drugs will be disposed of safely.

As Roseanne Becher, director of Pharmacy at St. Francis Eastside, wrote in a Sunday op-ed, the 1,219 pounds of unwanted medication collected in September 2012 meant "more than 1,000 pounds of drugs that will not fall into the wrong hands and be used illegally, end up in a landfill or pollute our waterways after being flushed down the toilet."

Each year, many Americans get prescription or over-the-counter medications that are not consumed entirely. Sometimes the drugs reach their expiration date, and sometimes the medicine belonged to someone who died. If the drugs are not disposed of properly, they can become a danger to the people in our community and a potential source of pollution.

The drugs sometimes can fall into the wrong hands — and especially young hands. Sometimes the drugs are flushed down the toilet and eventually make their way into our waterways, and that can harm fish and aquatic wildlife. As Becher wrote, Project Rx is about "protecting our rivers and our residents by properly disposing of medicine."

Project Rx makes it easy for people to dispose of drugs safely. No questions are asked about the drugs, and the service is provided free to people in the Upstate.

People can bring prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements, and veterinary medications. There are a few rules, such as use a black permanent marker to block out personal information

on labels, but people are asked to leave the drug name visible on the label to ensure proper disposal procedures.

Becher also reminded people of ways they can cut down on the number of unwanted medicines by following some recommendations of the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. It is recommended that people buy only what they need, centralize all medications in one location and decline to take samples that they won't use.

Also, sharps and syringes will not be accepted on Saturday.

Information about Project Rx, including up-to-date information on all the collection sites in the Upstate, can be found at ariverremedy.org. Convenient locations in Greenville event include St. Francis Millennium near CU-ICAR at 2 Innovation Drive, McAlister Square on South Pleasantburg Drive, Greenville Memorial Hospital on Grove Road and the Greenville Law Enforcement Center on McGee Street.

It will take only a few minutes Saturday to dispose of old or unwanted medications safely. People who participate in Project Rx can take pride in knowing they have made our community safer and our environment cleaner.