

Editorial: Dispose of your old medications Saturday

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(Photo: File)

You have the perfect opportunity Saturday to get rid of some of the old and unused drugs around your house, and it will be easier than ever to participate in Project Rx. There will be more drop-off locations in the Upstate for this event aimed at helping people dispose of expired and unused medications safely.

Project Rx is back for the 10th time since it was started in 2010, and during the previous nine events at least 10,866 pounds of medication were collected and incinerated. More information about Project Rx, including a full list of the collection locations, can be found at www.aRiverRemedy.org or by calling 864-299-4000. The event runs from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

The main locations for Project Rx are McAlister Square in Greenville on South Pleasantburg Drive, St. Francis Millennium camp on Innovation Drive, and Greenville Memorial Hospital on Grove Road. This year the drug take-back program has moved into Laurens and Oconee counties. Other locations are Greer Memorial Hospital, Hillcrest Memorial Hospital, Oconee Medical Campus and Laurens County Memorial Hospital.

Project Rx grew out of the disturbing realization that people were getting rid of unused or expired medications in a way that damaged the environment. Many people flushed old pills or dumped drugs down the kitchen sink. Sometimes they would just throw it in the trash.

At the same time, having medications sitting on a kitchen counter or on a shelf in the bathroom has occasionally created a temptation for a child. The drugs certainly don't need to fall into the wrong hands, just as they don't need to be stored casually around the house where they can be taken by accident.

As Ashley Rhinehart, public relations coordinator for Renewable Water Resources, and Stacey Flax, customer service/contract manager for ReWa, wrote in a Sunday op-ed, "Many households are contributing to the pollution of our water and communities and may not realize it. The pollutants include over-the-counter and prescription medications such as your common pain or allergy medicine!"

People can take a wide assortment of drugs to the collection sites. The sites will accept prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements and veterinary drugs. Sharps and syringes will not be accepted. The name of the drug should be visible on a bottle or box, but any personal information should be blacked out.

Project Rx had been taking place each spring and fall, but the decision was made this year to drop the spring event. A permanent drug collection box has been set up at the Greenville County Law Enforcement Center, and it has been well-received by people.

The collection event, even if just once a year, serves to highlight the problems that arise when people dispose of medications improperly. In fact, as Rhinehart and Flax wrote Sunday, the Environmental Protection Agency stopped encouraging people in the 1970s to flush unwanted medications because of concern about how the drugs were affecting our waterways and ultimately our water supply. It's taking a long time to get some people to break a habit developed decades ago.

About 4 billion prescriptions are filled each year in the United States, and it's estimated that about one-third of that medication isn't used completely. The Associated Press reported a few years ago that at least 41 million Americans drink water with detectable levels of pharmaceuticals.

At the same time, people experiencing pain or feeling sick can be tempted to share another person's medication instead of going to a doctor and getting a prescription written for a specific diagnosis. It's dangerous to share another person's medication, Dr. Stefanie Putnam wrote a year ago, because the dosing and selection of the medication is based on the weight and age of a person, the presence of allergies, potential interaction with other medications, and other factors that a doctor takes into consideration.

Take a few minutes today or Saturday morning and collect any old or unused medications sitting around your house. Dispose of them properly today, and you will have a safer home and a cleaner environment.

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