

Project Rx returns for second year

The Greenville News
5/22/11

Drug collection event seeks to keep meds out of local water supply

By Liv Osby
STAFF WRITER
losby@greenvilleonline.com

Thousands of prescriptions are written every day in the Upstate, but they often go unused and wind up being dumped down the drain.

What once was an accepted practice might have some impact on humans and wildlife, said Ray T. Orvin Jr., executive director of Renewable Water Resources, or ReWa, formerly the Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority.

So next month ReWa and its partners will hold Greenville County's second Project Rx, a drive-through event that collects old antibiotics, pain pills and other drugs to keep them out of the region's waterways and by extension, downstream from drinking water.

Prescription drugs are the main target.

"We're at the headwaters so we want to dispose of them in a safe and environmentally sound manner so they don't find their way back into the community," he said.

Federal agencies have detected trace levels of pharmaceuticals in the nation's waterways for years, and researchers are working to determine whether they have any impact on the environment and human health.

Efforts to keep drugs out of the waterways are important to protect downstream residents, said Jeff Kelble of Shenandoah Riverkeeper, a nonprofit environmental group in Virginia which found everything from antidepressants to synthetic hormones in the river water.

"It's important that this is something we're vigilant of as a society, particularly as drug use increases and as

MEDS

FROM PAGE 1B

our use of water resources increases as well," he said. "You have to remember that usually there are many people downstream."

The first collection held last November amassed more than 400 pounds of expired drugs that were disposed of through the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, one of the partner agencies. Among the drugs collected were hydrocodone, Adderall, Ritalin, pain killers and antibiotics.

Aside from protecting the environment and educating the community, the event aims to prevent the drugs from getting into the wrong hands, such as children.

This time, the collection will be done at two locations, McAlister Square and St. Francis Downtown, to make it more convenient

for residents.

"We are constantly asked by patients/families for solutions to properly dispose of drugs and prescription medications," said Karen Schwartz, vice president of support services for Bon Secours St. Francis Health System.

"Project Rx offers a quick, safe and convenient option for the Upstate to gain healthier lives, healthier homes and a healthier environment."

Along with expired or unwanted prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements and veterinary medicines also will be collected, no questions asked. Only medications, not needles or other medical supplies, will be collected.

"One of Upstate Forever's three main programs is promoting clean and safe water, so we are very concerned about the health of our waterways," said Nancy Fitzer, education director for the group. "We fully

YOU CAN GO

The second Project Rx collection will be June 18 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at McAlister Square off Pleasantburg Drive and St. Francis Downtown off U.S. 123. For more information, go to www.aRiverRemedy.org or call 864-467-4099.

support this effort to keep pharmaceuticals out of our water supply."

And this time, the medication containers will be recycled as well. Helping to recycle the containers addresses another part of the group's mission, which is to have clean and sustainable communities, Fitzer said.

Other partners include Greenville Family Partnership, Greenville Safe Communities, Greenville Technical College, the Carolina Institute for Community Policing, Greenville Hospital System and Whole Foods Market.

The location of future collections will be rotated to enhance access.