

Project Medicine Drop

Municipalities Join the Fight Against Prescription Drug Abuse



By Jeffrey S. Chiesa
Attorney General

During the coming weeks, approximately 15 municipal and county law enforcement agencies will join the Office of the Attorney General to announce their adoption of "Project Medicine Drop," a component of the state's effort to halt the growing epidemic of prescription painkiller abuse. These new partnerships bring the total number of Project Medicine Drop locations to 42 across New Jersey, including at least one in every county.

Prescription painkiller overdoses now kill 40 Americans per day—more than the number caused by cocaine and heroin overdoses combined. Here in New Jersey, prescription painkiller addiction led to more than 8,600 admissions to abuse treatment programs in 2011 alone—an increase of more than 200 percent over the past five years, and nearly 700 percent over the past decade.

The Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse believes that this problem fuels the heroin trade in New Jersey. After becoming hooked on opioid painkillers, a growing number of New Jersey teenagers have turned to heroin—another deadly opiate—as a cheaper substitute.

I met one such young person this past September, at an event to promote the placement of a Project Medicine Drop box at the Paramus Police Department. A high school student with a promising future as a football scholar, Donovan suffered a minor injury during a college tryout. A doctor prescribed Percocet. Within a very short amount of time, he was hooked.

When the doctor stopped prescribing this drug, Donovan turned to stealing painkillers from his grandfather's medicine cabinet, and later to buying prescription drugs from a dealer. Oxycodone costs \$1,500 for a two-day supply on the street, while heroin cost \$5 a bag. Like many other addicted teenagers in New Jersey, he made an economic decision that eventually resulted in a near-fatal heroin overdose.



Now 21, Donovan told me how he survived the overdose and found the will to take control of his life. Now in recovery, he has decided to become a counselor and help others overcome addiction. This brave young man's story starkly shows that prescription painkiller addiction can strike any family and any community. It is as much a problem of the suburbs as it is of urban areas.

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The Office of the Attorney General, and our partners at the county and municipal levels, are fighting this epidemic through data- and intelligence-driven investigations, tough law enforcement action, and engagement with the medical and pharmacy communities.

Project Medicine Drop is an important part of our multi-tiered strategy. Through this initiative, the state installs "prescription drug drop boxes"—distinctively decorated, secure metal receptacles that resemble mailboxes—at police departments, sheriff's offices and State Police barracks across New Jersey.

Residents are invited to dispose of their unused prescription drugs, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by visiting their nearest participating law enforcement agency and placing the unused drugs inside the box. The full list of locations, along with more information about this initiative, can be found at www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/meddrop.

The boxes are provided free of charge by the Attorney General's the Division of Consumer Affairs. Two New Jersey businesses, Covanta Energy and Wheelabrator Gloucester



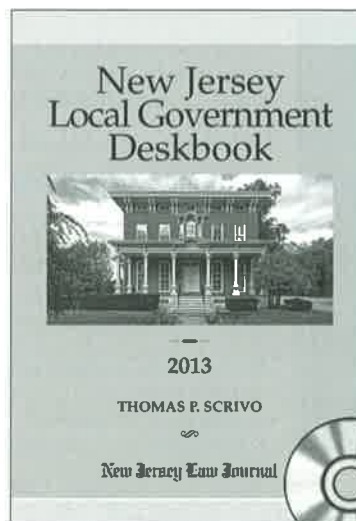
Attorney General Jeffrey S. Chiesa poses with Eileen McDowell and Vera Lopresti at the September 2012 inauguration of the Project Medicine Drop box at the Paramus Police Department. (Photo by Peter Ciamboli, New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs)

County, have agreed to destroy the drugs at no cost to police departments, in a partnership endorsed by the Department of Environmental

Protection. The program thus creates no new cost to taxpayers or police, and a net benefit to the participating communities.

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The program is inspired by the success of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's National Drug Take Back Initiative, which offers single-day events during which the public is invited to drop off unwanted medications. Project Medicine Drop, however, enables consumers to dispose of unused medications in a safe and secure manner at any time throughout the year. It helps keep prescription drugs from falling into the hands of those who might make them available for abuse, and prevents them from being flushed into the water supply or thrown into the trash where they could contaminate the environment.

Residents have eagerly embraced the program, and dropped off approximately 4,000 pounds of medications at the first seven Project Medicine Drop locations established during the program's first 12 months.

If your municipality is not yet a Project Medicine Drop partner, I urge you to contact the Office of the Attorney General at 609-984-9498 and find out whether your police department

meets the requirements for creating a secure Project Medicine Drop.

We also urge municipalities to use their newsletters and post signs at police stations and other municipal buildings to help make residents aware of the program. Detailed advice for consumers, along with downloadable flyers and posters, can also be found at the Project Medicine Drop website.

THE BOXES ARE PROVIDED
FREE OF CHARGE BY THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL'S
THE DIVISION OF
CONSUMER AFFAIRS.

It's also important to:

- Speak with your children and grandchildren about prescription drug abuse.

- Keep the medications in your home safe and secure.
- Keep them in a single location, preferably a lockable cabinet or childproof box.
- Create a written inventory of your medicines, and update it every six months.
- Dispose of any unused or expired medication in a safe and secure manner, such as bringing it to your nearest Project Medicine Drop location.

The epidemic of prescription drug abuse and the problems to which it contributes, including increased crime and lost productivity, is not just a law enforcement problem.

Project Medicine Drop is based on the principle that everyone, including parents, grandparents and young people, has a role in curbing the diversion and abuse of prescription drugs. We need to start thinking differently about the drugs that are prescribed for pain—and the great dangers that come when those drugs are misused. ▲

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