

Solid Waste Interested Parties Presentation notes, 5/15/2013

TITLE SLIDE

I am Barb Bickford, DNR's medical waste coordinator.

I'm here to brief you on an important environmental and public health issue, pharmaceutical waste.

HOUSEHOLD PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE

DNR, UW Extension and others have been collaborating on this issue for quite some time.

Over the years, we have been asked, but didn't have the answers to these questions:

- What do people do with household medication waste?
- How much of it is actually generated?
- What are the barriers to collecting unused pharmaceuticals?

DNR contracted with UW Extension and the Product Stewardship Institute to answer these questions and to research ways to overcome the barriers.

The study is posted online, here:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/HealthWaste/documents/2012HouseholdPharmStudy.pdf>

WHERE DO OUR UNUSED DRUGS GO?

Surveys of Wisconsin residents show that most people:

- Flush drugs
- Throw them in the trash.
- Store them indefinitely.

Drugs that are flushed or landfilled may end up in surface water and groundwater.

In contrast, drugs that end up in collection programs are safely incinerated instead.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

There ARE concerns about pharmaceuticals in the environment.

- There are documented effects on aquatic organisms.
- We don't know about effects of long-term, low-level human exposure to pharmaceuticals in water, but we suspect there may be some.
- We do know there are measurable amounts of pharmaceuticals in many lakes and streams, including Lake Michigan. Lake Michigan is the drinking water source for many of Wisconsin's biggest cities.

PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

In addition to the environmental concerns that are DNR's primary focus, there are public health concerns such as drug abuse, overdoses and poisonings.

This aspect concerns such diverse groups as law enforcement, community coalitions, healthcare providers, public health agencies, schools, legislators and local governments.

The DNR report will help all the stakeholders tackle this problem.

HOUSEHOLD COLLECTIONS

And how has Wisconsin responded to this emerging issue? The report documents that

- over 90% of Wisconsin counties have drug collections now, compared to a few years ago when there were none.
- While early collections were one day collection events, now most of them are available 24/7 and run by local law enforcement.
- people do use collection programs when they are available and local communities take great pride in what they collect.
- in 2011, we collected a LOT – 93,500 lb. That's over 46 TONS of drugs. Did we get it all?

HOW MUCH WASTE IS THERE?

Unfortunately no.

The report estimates that 13 million pounds of medication are sold each year in Wisconsin. Other studies have indicated that about 1/3 of that would go unused, which suggests over 4 million pounds of drugs go unused in Wisconsin each year.

In 2011, we only collected about 2 percent of that amount.

To collect more, we need a system that is

- Comprehensive
- Convenient
- Easy to operate
- Environmentally sound
- Sustainably funded

CHALLENGES

DNR has already taken steps to meet some of these challenges, by streamlining waste regulations and collaborating with many stakeholders.

I just want to highlight some of the bigger challenges cited in the report:

- Currently all our drugs are transported out of state for incineration.
- Federal laws that apply to controlled substances make it difficult to manage waste drug efficiently, because law enforcement has to be involved in collecting, storing and transporting them.
- The cost of current WI system is high and is funded mostly by local governments, with some help from state and federal agencies.
- The report highlights other collection systems that may be more economical and effective.

BETTER ENVIRONMENT, BETTER COMMUNITIES

The report documents what has been done so far and provides the basis for dialogue on how best to manage household pharmaceutical waste in the future.

By addressing the challenges, Wisconsin can create an effective and sustainable pharmaceutical collection system that will reduce impacts both on its environment and its communities.