Community members can join law enforcement, local government and health professionals in protecting San Joaquin County. Learn how:

- Lock Up Medications page 3
- Don’t Rush to Flush Medications or Needles page 4
- Meds in the Bin, We All Win page 6
Properly disposing of unwanted medications and used sharps — such as needles, lancets and auto-injectors — is a safety priority for individuals and the community.

Flushing these items may seem like an easy option for disposal but it is actually a serious environmental and health hazard. In actuality, treatment plants are not designed to remove medications from the water. That means some medication that is flushed ends up in our waterways and, eventually, in our drinking water.

If you can’t flush then the trash is the next best option, right? Wrong.

“Medications thrown in the garbage can become fuel for addiction, result in an overdose, or cause accidental poisoning,” said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

These common disposal problems are easily preventable.

Thankfully, disposing of medication in San Joaquin County is easy: Take the unwanted medication to one of the County’s DEA-authorized disposal locations and then drop it into a specially designated bin.

However, safety does not end at the medicine cabinet. Because some medications and medical tests are taken by blood, special care must be taken to dispose of these needles, also called sharps. Used sharps are considered hazardous waste and must also be quickly and properly disposed of — and the toilet is not an option.

San Joaquin County residents have a new way to safely dispose of unwanted medications and used needles.

“Improper disposal of medication or needles affects the entire community — from fueling drug addiction and threatening public safety to needles being found in parks, waterways and even libraries.

Criminals may use medications that are tossed into the trash or sell them on the black market. This risk is even greater in neighborhoods where there are large numbers of seniors.

Used sharps that have been thrown into the trash or recycling accidentally stick workers and can expose them to diseases.

“I have talked to code enforcement staff and when they have to secure an empty house, they come across a lot of sharps,” explained City of Stockton Solid Waste Manager Gretchen Olsen.

However, the most shocking needle surprise comes at the library. “People are putting sharps in the library book return slots,” she said.

Sharps flushed down the toilet can become lodged in equipment, forcing county workers to remove them by hand, exposing workers to accidental and dangerous needle sticks. Tossing sharps in the trash or recycling is illegal in the state of California because of Senate Bill 1305, which was passed in 2006 to protect waste workers.

Used sharps need to be properly disposed of in a designated sharps container and then taken to a sharps disposal location. Just like medication disposal, sharps disposal only takes one easy step.

There are currently dozens of sharps and medication disposal bins located throughout the County with more on the way, thanks to a unique collaborative effort between the City of Stockton, San Joaquin County and other area organizations.

“This effort is the result of a partnership among a broad range of stakeholder groups.”

Bob Elliott
District 5 Supervisor
San Joaquin County

Bob Elliott said, “Thank you to all the community leaders and organizations that made these disposal bins possible, including San Joaquin County Public Works, The Rose Foundation, and the California Product Stewardship Council.”

Find out where to drop off unwanted medications and sharps at www.sjrecycle.org or call San Joaquin County Public Works at 209-468-3066.
Today, Americans fill nearly three times as many prescriptions as they did in 1980 and spend five times as much on over-the-counter drugs, according to a report by Safe Kids Worldwide. This increase in more household medications has also resulted in a dangerous unintended consequence.

“Having medications in the home can increase the risk of accidental ingestion or poisonings, leading to a significant number of emergency room visits. Especially in toddlers,” said San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin.

And that phenomenon includes San Joaquin County. Over the past five years, there have been 800 visits to emergency departments in the region by children under the age of five due to accidental poisonings.

The nationwide statistics are just as shocking. Poison control centers get a call about a child ingesting medication that they “found” once a minute — every day. Emergency rooms see roughly four busloads — or over 300 — poisoned children daily, all from medications that should have been properly secured or removed from the home when they were no longer needed and properly disposed of.

Keeping children safe from accidental medication poisoning is about not assuming — not assuming the medication is out of reach of a child and not assuming a child-proof bottle is actually child proof.

“If a child spends time at a grandparent or other caregiver’s home, parents need to make sure those caregivers are also storing their medication safely,” said Zerbo.

SAFE AT HOME

Thousands of children in the U.S. find their way into medicine bottles they shouldn’t each year, including children in San Joaquin County.

800 visits to San Joaquin County emergency rooms in the past five years by children under the age of 5 were due to accidental poisonings.

64 percent of those visits were attributed to medications.

DO

• DO lock up medications.
• DO store medications in their original containers — labels can help prevent medications from being mixed up.
• DO keep an updated list of all prescription medication in your home, so you know if something goes missing.
• DO talk to your pharmacist about how to properly dispose of unused medications.

DON’T

• DON’T leave medications where kids or pets can get them.
• DON’T share prescription medications. A medication that works for one person may cause harm — even death — to someone else, even if symptoms are similar.
• DON’T take medications in front of children, which can lead to them imitating this behavior.

“Safe medicine storage means out of sight and out of reach — not one or the other.”

Rachel Zerbo
Coalition Coordinator
Safe Kids San Joaquin County

Sandra Chavez’s youngest son, Jeff, died as a result of prescription drug abuse that began when he was a teen. Sandra’s family learned of his addiction when he was arrested for being in possession of meds not intended for him.

PHOTO BY RON NABITY

Lock up your medications! You might save the life of someone you love

by Rodney Orosco

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Flushing unused and expired medications down the drain may be what you were told to do to get rid of them. Even the Federal Drug Administration controversially tells the public to discard some of the most addictive medications down the drain to avoid accidental poisonings or purposeful misuse if there is no take-back program available. However, the effects of flushing pharmaceuticals can have long-term and wide-spread ramifications on both humans and the environment. It is a threat that is real and growing.

While most people know that anything flushed down the drain ends up at a water treatment plant, most aren’t aware of the intricate processes involved in water cleaning. According to Brandon Nakagawa, Water Resource Coordinator with the San Joaquin County Department of Public Works, those processes aren’t geared toward removing medications.

“We have treatment processes that take out organic matter and then use microbes to digest those compounds. It reduces the organic matter in the water to a point where we can discharge it back to the river or stream,” he said. “Pharmaceuticals are something that our systems aren’t necessarily designed to remove.”

After being treated, this water can be routinely used as drinking water. But according to the Environmental Protection Agency, pharmaceuticals are increasingly being detected in drinking water. Even when found in miniscule amounts, the number of compounds that end up in the public’s drinking water, combined with long-term cumulative exposure to these compounds, becomes worrisome.

“You have unused medicines mixing together into an unintended soup and getting into groundwater, and often then getting into waterways,” said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment. “It’s a type of pollution, short and simple, and it doesn’t make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out.”

While technology that can remove pharmaceutical compounds from water is starting to emerge, it can be very expensive and still isn’t used or required at most waste water treatment plants. Thus, the best and least costly way to keep medications out of local water supplies is to dispose of them through convenient disposal bins or collection events throughout San Joaquin County.

“Maybe we won’t know for decades the exact effects of pharmaceuticals in the water, maybe we’ll know sooner than later, but why take the chance?” Nakagawa said. “Let’s do the right thing and dispose of things properly.”

“It doesn’t make sense to throw pollution into waterways when there is an easy way — and efficient way — to keep it out.”

Tim Little
Executive Director
Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment

THE COST OF FLUSHING

- Only half of medications in sewage can be removed by water treatment plants once flushed, as found in a 2013 report by the International Joint Commission, leading to traces of medications showing up in drinking water supplies.

- Intact medications are more potent than excreted drugs, which have been metabolized.

- Pharmaceutical compounds may affect physiological responses in humans, plants and animals, according to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- Estrogen and testosterone used in certain medications — as well as other endocrine disruptors — cause significant reproductive effects on aquatic wildlife, even at very low levels of exposure.

- Trace amounts of antibiotics lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria in our water.

- The wide array of medications found in waterways can have unanticipated impacts on drinking water supplies and wildlife.
STICK SHARPS in Their Place — a Certified Container

Used sharps are a danger when not disposed of properly

by Rodney Orosco

Lorena Dominguez’s day at work started just like any other, but ended in panic.
As a recycling line worker at the Stockton Recycling Material Recycling Facility (MRF), Dominguez’s job is to watch the line as items whiz by and remove any that are not recyclable. Dominguez does this by hand, grabbing items like plastic bags, garbage, dirty food containers and toys when she sees them.

But what Dominguez did not see one day was a needle hidden in a bag underneath a pizza box.

“When I first got stuck, my first thought was that it was a needle because I felt the pain,” Dominguez said. “I stopped the line and discovered the needle was in the bag I was holding. It was full of loose needles.”

What happened next is all too common for recycling line workers: months of treatment accompanied by months of worry.

“It took four months to finally receive an answer that everything was OK,” she said. “My family was worried because they did not know what that needle could be infected with.”

Because of the improper disposal of sharps, needle sticks are a far too common hazard for MRF workers.

“Every day our workers see needles coming across the recycling line,” said Stockton Recycling MRF General Manager Michael White.

Even being careful or wearing heavy gloves doesn’t always protect workers from an accidental stick.

“Being stuck [by a needle] is definitely one of the biggest scares for our employees,” White said.

There is still danger when needles are placed into plastic containers and thrown in the trash or recycling. These containers can burst when compressed in garbage trucks during collection, causing the sharps to mix in with the recyclables.

“We see plastic milk jugs full of needles,” White said. “The caps pop off the jugs, the needles spill out, or the needles poke through the plastic and jab one of the workers.”

Needles are not only a safety concern on the line, they are also a productivity concern — which costs money.

“We have to stop the line when we see needles. It is a hard stop,” White said.

The result is dozens of paid workers standing around while they wait for the issue to be resolved.

All these problems can be solved if San Joaquin County residents keep their used sharps out of the trash and dispose of them properly the first time, by using one of the County’s disposal bins.

While Dominguez, a three-year veteran of the recycling line, is not afraid to get back to the line, many victims of an accidental stick do not return to work because of stress. Dominguez does express concern.

“I am more cautious and feel anxious when there is a bigger pile of material coming through the line,” she said.

Used sharps are a danger when not disposed of properly

Disposing of used sharps and needles correctly is not only the law in California, it is a simple act that can protect the community.

**DO**
- Do take needles to a pharmacy or other location with a proper disposal bin.
- Do put sharps in an FDA-cleared container prior to putting them in the disposal bin.
- Do ask your pharmacist how to properly dispose of unused medications.

**DON’T**
- Don’t throw needles into the trash.
- Don’t flush needles down the toilet.
- Don’t place needles in a plastic container and then throw that container into the garbage or recycling.
San Joaquin County is growing its disposal programs with help from the Rose Foundation.

"It benefits the environment and it's the right thing to do from a medical perspective."

Harold Reich
Owner and Pharmacist
Reich's Pharmacy

Since 1990, Pharmacist Harold Reich’s business plan has revolved around service to his community. For many years, Reich’s Pharmacy accepted and disposed of customers’ unused pharmaceuticals at the company’s expense simply because it was the right thing to do. But when the practice became too costly, San Joaquin County stepped in by creating a pilot medication take-back program in 2016.

“The disposal bins have made it something that we can definitely participate in as a business. It’s a community service that we try to promote,” Reich said. “I think it’s two-fold — I think it benefits the environment and it’s the right thing to do from a medical perspective.”

The County was able to help due in part to a grant from the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit dedicated to providing resources that allow communities to participate in environmental causes that affect their residents. The organization granted $200,000 to the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) to expand San Joaquin County’s existing program. CPSC increased the number of medication disposal bins and gave residents an easy and responsible disposal option so they wouldn’t flush medications down the drain and into the environment.

“I think most people want to do the right thing, and I think as humans we’re all driven toward doing the easy thing, because we’re all busy people,” said Tim Little, the Rose Foundation’s Executive Director. “That’s what the take-back is about, making it easy to do the right thing.”

Reich said he is still astounded at the volume of expired medications his customers have at home and wouldn’t know what to do with, if not for the program. If left in the home, these medications could have the potential to be misused.

“It’s scary really, in some regards, that they have access to something that’s been expired for many years,” he said. “Getting those things out of the medicine cabinets in people’s homes reduces the temptation and likelihood that somebody will get a hold of something they shouldn’t, and cause themselves or others harm.”
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is just what it sounds like: extending the responsibilities of manufacturers past the sale of their products. It requires producers to clean up their own mess, so to speak.

“Our society is really good at producing stuff, but we’re not really good at taking responsibility for it once it’s been used,” said Tim Little, Executive Director of the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, a nonprofit that provides communities with resources to get involved in ecological issues. “By having producer responsibility, you start to get mechanisms to properly manage them.”

According to Heidi Sanborn, Co-founder and Executive Director of the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC), producers should share the responsibility for the life cycle of products they create and sell — meaning they should be on the hook for costs associated with safely recycling or disposing of the materials.

But what happens instead is local governments — and taxpayers, like those in San Joaquin County — foot the bill for safe disposal programs and events, including those that accept unwanted medications and used sharps. These programs may be free at point of disposal for residents, but have a high price tag for the local governments that are funded by the residents. “Our country has privatized profits and socialized costs. We don’t think that’s fair,” Sanborn said. “The bottom line is that local governments cannot afford to provide the programs to the level that they need to be available to get a high level of participation from the public.”

The producers of these products argue that if they paid for disposal and take-back programs, they would ultimately pass these costs on to consumers in the form of more expensive products. But Sanborn says that consumers are already paying costs through their local governments.

“What we’ve done with this current system is to bury the costs, so nobody knows what they’re paying for,” she said. “Taxpayers don’t know that a fluorescent lamp costs as much to recycle as it does to buy. They just drop it off for ‘free’ at their public facility. But it’s not free at all.”

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**Disposal Locations in San Joaquin County**

**Legend**
- : Disposal bins for meds and sharps
- : Disposal bin for sharps only
- : Disposal bin for meds only
- : Does not accept controlled substances

### Escalon
1. Escalon Police Department
   - 2040 McHenry Ave, Escalon, CA 95320
   - 209-838-7093

2. Vineyard Pharmacy and Gifts
   - 1900 McHenry Ave, Ste. 202
   - Escalon, CA 95320
   - 209-838-0511

### Lockeford
3. Lockeford Drug
   - 14090 CA-88
   - Lockeford, CA 95237
   - 209-727-3762

4. Young’s Payless Market – IGA
   - 18980 CA-88
   - Lockeford, CA 95237
   - 209-727-3762

### Lodi
5. Community Medical Centers, Lodi
   - 2401 W. Turner Road, Ste. 450
   - Lodi, CA 95242
   - 209-370-1700

6. Fairmont Pharmacy
   - 1121 W. Vine St., Ste. 13
   - Lodi, CA 95240
   - 209-625-8633

7. Lodi Police Department
   - 215 W. Elm St.
   - Lodi, CA 95240
   - 209-333-6728

8. Walgreens
   - 75 N. Ham Lane
   - Lodi, CA 95242
   - 209-369-8575

### Manteca
9. City of Manteca Solid Waste Division Admin Office
   - 210 E. Wetmore St.
   - Manteca, CA 95337
   - 209-456-8440

10. Community Medical Center, Manteca
    - 200 Cottage Ave., Ste. 103
    - Manteca, CA 95336
    - 209-624-5800

11. Manteca Police Department
    - 1001 W. Center St.
    - Manteca, CA 95337
    - 209-239-8401

### Ripon
12. Ripon Police Department
    - 259 N. Wilma Ave.
    - Ripon, CA 95366
    - 209-599-2102

### Stockton
13. Angkor Pharmacy
    - 4555 N. Pershing Ave., Ste. 7
    - Stockton, CA 95207
    - 209-473-4706

14. Community Medical Centers, Channel
    - 701 E. Channel St.
    - Stockton, CA 95202
    - 209-944-4700

15. Community Medical Centers, Waterloo
    - 1031 Waterloo Road
    - Stockton, CA 95205
    - 209-940-5600

16. Dignity Health – St. Joseph’s Medical Center
    - 1800 N. California St.
    - Stockton, CA 95204
    - 209-943-2000

17. El Dorado Drug Store
    - 2005 S. East Mariposa Road
    - Stockton, CA 95205
    - 209-464-7722

18. Forty Nine Drug Co.
    - 937 N. Yosemite St.
    - Stockton, CA 95203
    - 209-465-2671

19. Kaiser Permanente Pharmacy
    - 7373 West Lane, 1st Floor
    - Stockton, CA 95210
    - 209-476-3242

20. Rx Express Pharmacy
    - 711 E. Market St.
    - Stockton, CA 95202
    - 209-465-1001

21. San Joaquin County Household Hazardous Waste Facility
    - 7850 R.A. Bridgeford St.
    - Stockton, CA 95206
    - 209-468-3066

22. Abala Pharmacy
    - Tracy, CA 95376
    - 209-832-7080

23. Grant Line Pharmacy
    - 2160 W. Grant Line Road, Ste. 205
    - Tracy, CA 95377
    - 209-832-2999

24. Harold K. Reich’s Pharmacy
    - 39 W. 10th St.
    - Tracy, CA 95376
    - 209-835-1832

25. Tracy Police Department
    - 1000 Civic Center Drive
    - Tracy, CA 95376
    - 209-831-6550

26. Tracy Material Recovery Facility
    - 30703 S. MacArthur Drive
    - Tracy, CA 95377
    - 209-832-2355

27. Tracy Recycling Buyback Center
    - 590 10th St.
    - Tracy, CA 95376
    - 209-832-1024

More locations coming! Find an updated list at www.sjcrecycle.org or call 209-468-3066.

### Medication and Sharps Disposal Instructions
- **Medication bins accept:**
  - Sprays
  - Liquids
  - Pills
  - Pet medications
  - Ointments/lotions

- **Sharps bins accept:**
  - Needles
  - Lancets
  - Auto injectors

Make sure pills are in zip top bags, and any containers are shut tight!

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