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PASSAGE OF SECOND U.S. “SECURE MEDICINE RETURN” LAW PROTECTS CONSUMER SAFETY & IGNITES NATIONAL PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP MOVEMENT

King County, Washington, Joins Alameda County, California, in Mandating Drug Manufacturer-Paid Program to Take Back Unused Medications

Seattle, Wash. – Public health officials around the country are finding new hope for establishing secure medicine take-back programs following a June 20 victory in King County, Washington, on top of last year’s groundbreaking vote in Alameda County, California. While medicines have the power to reduce pain and save lives, they can have fatal consequences when they fall into the wrong hands—poisoning small children or becoming the drug-of-choice for young teens. In fact, more people die from overdoses due to prescription medicines than from heroin and cocaine combined. But, most families don’t have good options at hand to get unused medicines safely out of their homes: Throwing pills in the garbage is not enough to deter addicts, and flushing them down the toilet may have environmental consequences.

King County Board of Health Chair Joe McDermott described his motivation to address the problem of unsecured medicines, in the county that is home to the Seattle metropolitan area: “I cannot emphasize enough—this is about public health. In just one year in King County, 209 residents died from an overdose of prescription opiates or sedatives. That’s the equivalent to a crash of a full Boeing 737 airplane. I look forward to soon seeing secure drop boxes for residents to use, free-of-charge, throughout the county.”

Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley congratulated Chair McDermott and the entire King County Board of Health, and noted, “It isn’t just Alameda and King County struggling with the pharmaceutical issue, it is a national public health issue. We hope the pharmaceutical companies and retailers will work proactively together with government to solve this problem and share in the responsibility for the lifecycle of their products.”

Both municipalities’ regulations use a product stewardship approach that calls for drug manufacturers who produce and sell the medications to pay for the take-back programs as part of doing business. Despite opposition by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America and the Consumer Healthcare Product Association, other industry representatives gave public comment in support of the King County program. Speaking in favor of the regulation

were representatives of Group Health Cooperative and Bartell Drugs, which both run voluntary take-back programs at some of their locations, as well as the Washington State Pharmacy Association. The measure also had broad support from community members including drug-free community groups, nurses, hospice professionals, law enforcement, children's advocates, environmental groups and local municipalities.

"The King County Board of Health has taken an important step toward protecting their residents' safety and saving their taxpayers money," said Scott Cassel, Chief Executive Officer of the Product Stewardship Institute, which has been working on pharmaceutical waste stewardship initiatives with King County and other governments for over five years. "This vote, which comes less than a year after Alameda County's groundbreaking law passage, reflects an important paradigm shift in this country, and a widening national embrace of the principles of product stewardship."

Caroll Mortensen, Director of the California Department of Resources, Recycling and Recovery, explained why county-level municipalities are enacting these programs instead of awaiting a national policy: "A comprehensive approach to properly manage pharmaceuticals to minimize public health and safety and environmental concerns continues to elude us. In lieu of this, many local governments have been put in the difficult position of having to set up collection programs without sustainable funding. So, it's understandable that local jurisdictions such as Alameda and King Counties have chosen to enact ordinances to better deal with this problem within their own jurisdictions. As we have seen with plastic grocery bags, until a more comprehensive approach is enacted at the national or state level, more jurisdictions are likely to consider adopting their own ordinances."

King County Board of Health member and Mayor of Kenmore David Baker added, "Secure medicine return was the missing piece of the puzzle in slowing the epidemic of prescription drug abuse. We have implemented strong education, monitoring and enforcement programs, but the fact remained that about one-third of medicines go unused and people had no good way of getting them out of their medicine cabinets—until now."

Public health officials, academics and healthcare providers around the country are studying these pioneers closely. Recent invitations to speak include the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, North American Hazardous Materials Management Association, National Association of State Controlled Substances Authorities, Pharmaceutical Waste Stewardship Summit (underwritten by a federal grant from U.S. EPA) and the upcoming International Symposium on Safe Medicines, where the new victory will no doubt be celebrated amidst calls for a national approach to keeping children and teens safe from preventable poisonings and drug overdoses.

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