



SAVING OUR KIDS AND RIVERS FROM DRUGS: OPERATION MEDICINE CABINET HOPES TO BUILD ON PREVIOUS SUCCESS IN THE HIGH COUNTRY.

Across Watauga county drugs will be collected, in conjunction with Hazardous Household Waste Collection Day. Take-back locations will be available at the Foscoe Fire Department, and the three Food Lion stores in Watauga County: the Highway 321 store in Boone, the Highway 421 Deep Gap store, and the Blowing Rock store.

On Oct. 3, 2009, a broad coalition of community partners came together to create the first ever prescription drug take-back day in the High Country. The event was a huge success, safely disposing of 40,000 pills and 12 gallons of liquid medication in Watauga County alone. In the spring of 2010, another drug take back was held, this time with more locations including three sites in Avery County. That event collected over 188,000 pills and 20 gallons of liquid medication, making it one of the most successful drug take back events in the state. Organizers hope to continue this success and collect even more drugs this fall.

The disposal of prescription drugs has long been a dilemma, and many medicine cabinets contain unused or outdated medications. Among teenagers, the fastest growing illegal drug use is the abuse of prescription drugs. The most common method of obtaining prescription drugs is by raiding the medicine cabinet of a friend or family, then consuming the pills or selling them.

“From a law enforcement perspective, one of our most important jobs is to work diligently and proactively to prevent drug abuse,” said Watauga County Sherriff Len D. Hagaman. “By hosting an amnesty day that allows the public to turn in any kind of unused or unwanted medications, hopefully, we will keep those drugs off the street and out of the hands of children.”

Another problem with outdated or unused prescription drugs is that people dispose of them improperly by flushing them down the toilet. If their home is connected to a local waste water treatment facility, then the drugs wind up in either the Watauga River or New River.

“A recent investigation by the Associated Press found a whole host of pharmaceuticals-including antibiotics, pain medication, anti-depressants, sex hormones, heart and blood pressure medicine-in-

the drinking water supplies of more than 40 million Americans,"<sup>1</sup> said Donna Lisenby, Watauga Riverkeeper.

ASU biology and chemistry students and faculty have conducted environmental tests to determine the effects of pharmaceutical estrogens (birth control and estrogen supplements) from the Boone Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) on male fish populations in the South Fork of the New River.

The results indicated that 60 to 66 percent of two species of male fish below the WWTP effluent are being feminized; tests with rainbow trout have yet to be conducted.

"Although preliminary tests have shown that pharmaceutical estrogens in the river just below the WWTP are right at levels known to cause feminization, it is unlikely that these levels persist very far downstream," said Dr. Shea Tuberty, of ASU's biology department. "Any attempt to reduce the quantity of pharmaceuticals in water is a significant step towards environmental conservation."

Community members reached out to law enforcement officials from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Sheriff's Department as well as the Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils Police Departments. The river conservationists and law enforcement community united to fight the problem of prescription drug misuse.

"It has been an amazing testament to the collaborative spirit of our community to see how enthusiastically people have united to help host Operation Medicine Cabinet," said Wendy Patoprsty, Watauga County Extension Agent. "We have over 30 community partners, including, Helen M. Clabough Charitable Foundation, MountainKeepers, Watauga River Conservation Partners, Towns, and police departments of, Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils, the Ashe and Watauga County Sheriff's Office, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Safe Kids North Carolina, Boone Drug, Watauga County Recycling/Solid Waste Department, Watauga Riverkeeper, Appalachian Voices, Food Lion, CVS, the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, Trophy Water Guide Service, Rotary Club of Blowing Rock, The National Committee for the New River, MPrints, NC Cooperative Extension Service, Precision Printing, the Smoky Mountain Center and Appalachian State University just to name a few," she continued.

"On behalf of all our partners, we are pleased to offer this new opportunity to our citizens to safely dispose of unused or unwanted medications properly, and we hope you will come see us on To find out more about the event click to *DrugTakeBackDay.com*.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-03-10-drugs-tap-water\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-03-10-drugs-tap-water_N.htm)