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New County Policy Requires Drug Makers to Pick Up Disposal Costs

OAKLAND, July 24, 2012_ The Alameda County Board of Supervisors passed a new policy, the first in the country, requiring drug companies to pay for collecting and disposing of leftover drugs they manufacture. The unanimous vote today positions the County as a national leader for its producer responsibility approach on addressing the problem of what residents should do with their unused and expired medications.

“I am proud that we’ve found a more sustainable policy solution that promotes good will and corporate social responsibility,” said Supervisor Nate Miley, President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. “The community’s growing demand for more permanent and convenient medication disposal sites goes far beyond what the County can fund and operate on its own.”

Currently, there are 28 med collection sites throughout Alameda County, which dispose of discarded medications at a cost of \$40,000 per year. The collection sites are operated by 10 different agencies and labor is donated by many participating agencies such as East Bay Municipal Utility District, Union Sanitary District and the City of San Leandro. Of the annual \$186 million in profits generated by drug companies in Alameda County, officials say the projected cost of a comprehensive program producer-funded program would be about 1 cent for every \$33 of pharmaceuticals sold in the County.

Alameda County has become the first local government in the country to enact a policy mandating pharmaceutical companies design, operate and fund a collection program. The effort has attracted wide support from a variety of cities and agencies throughout the Bay Area and across the country struggling with the same issue.

“This ordinance is the low hanging fruit that gives us something that we can do now to help avoid medication waste from getting into our environment at the source,” said Andria Ventura, Program Manager at Clean Water Action in San Francisco. “It makes financial, environmental and social sense.”

The Alameda County Medication Education Disposal Safety Coalition (MEDS), a local grassroots organization, partnered with Miley’s office to bring the legislation forward. MEDS is concerned about senior safety issues and prescription drug abuse by adults and children.

In addition to local support, letters have been submitted from across the country by organizations and individuals such as political figure and environmental attorney Robert F. Kennedy Jr. He states in a letter, “I applaud Alameda County’s leadership and encourage the county to proceed and adopt the ordinance and I hope that this leads to action nationally.”

The scarcity of medication collection sites has led residents to stockpile drugs in their homes, throw medications in the trash or flush them down the toilet – all of which have public health, safety and environmental risks.

The Safe Drug Disposal Ordinance is based on an [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\) policy framework, adopted by CalRecycle in 2008](#), which places primary responsibility on minimizing the environmental, health and public safety impact on whoever produces a product.

According to Alameda County Household Hazardous Waste Programs about 1.5 million of the county’s residents have as much as 681 tons of unwanted drugs stockpiled in medicine cabinets. Poisoning is also the fastest rising cause of accidental death among older adults in the county particularly from prescription and illicit drugs.