



Media Release

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Arkansas Collected More Than 18,000 Pounds of Unused Medication during Take Back Event

Natural State collected more than Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi combined

Arkansans turned in 18,008 pounds of unused or expired medications – an estimated 25.1 million pills – during the 7th Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Prescription Drug Take Back event last month, State Drug Director Fran Flener announced Thursday. That's the second highest total collected in Arkansas since the state began participating in the nationwide events in 2010.

Arkansas collected more pounds of medication than the neighboring states of Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi combined, despite being the least populated. Nationally, Arkansas ranked #4 in pounds collected per person through the six previous Take Back events. And despite being the 32nd most populated state, Arkansas ranked 17th in total pounds of pills collected during those events.

"I think we reached a tipping point. People here are really starting to understand just how harmful these unused medications can be and are willing to take the time to clean out their cabinets and dispose of these drugs properly," Flener said of the Oct. 26 event. "That's exactly what we wanted to see happen. Hopefully, we'll continue to see this level of turnout at future events."

The Take Back program removes unused or unwanted medications from homes, where they could be stolen, accidentally ingested, abused, or become a water pollutant. Collected medications are taken to an incinerator and destroyed.

Since 2010, Arkansas has collected more than 115 million pills – that's more than 41 tons of medications. At the same time, prescription drug abuse among teens has dropped in 27 out of the 30 measured areas.

Pulaski County Sheriff Doc Holladay said his office participates in the Drug Take Back events because recreational use of prescription medications is killing children and causing addictions that often land people behind bars.

"We as law enforcement officials need to be doing everything we can to get these medications off the street," Holladay said, adding that his agency collected 647.1 pounds of medication during the Oct. 26 event. "These events make a difference."

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Benton Police Department Public Information Office Lt. Kevin Russell said the Take Back events have made a substantial and positive impact on his city.

“They have allowed us to form alliances with organizations and businesses in Benton to tackle this issue and have resulted in fewer incidents of prescription drug overdoses and increased awareness among parents and caregivers,” Russell said.

During the eight Take Back events that Benton police have participated in, the agency has received and destroyed 2 ¾ tons of unused medication from Saline County.

The Pulaski County Sheriff’s Office and the Benton Police Department are among 132 law enforcement agencies in Arkansas that have permanent and secure Take Back boxes at their agency headquarters. For more information about permanent Take Back boxes or Arkansas’s efforts, go to www.artakeback.org.