

Erie, Pennsylvania

Program Overview:

On April 26, 2008, Pennsylvania Sea Grant and its partners the City of Erie, Lake Erie-Allegheny Earth Force, LECOM school of Pharmacy, and Erie Times-News in Education held a first of its kind unwanted medicine collection event in Erie, Pennsylvania entitled “Keep Unwanted Medicine out of Lake Erie”. The City of Erie and the surrounding area are home to over 250,000 people and encompass 63 miles of Lake Erie shoreline. The goals of this project were to reduce the number of chemicals being disposed of down the drain, ending up in the Great Lakes, and also to raise awareness and increase knowledge of Erie citizens about the impact improper disposal of pharmaceuticals may have on Lake Erie water quality. This was a one year project funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The project components were two-fold: A media campaign and the unwanted medicine collection event.

In addition to holding the event, a media campaign was implemented to inform Erie residents about the pharmaceutical waste collection project. This media campaign included:

- Development of project posters, postcards, and pharmacy slips incorporating information about the event as well as the federal guidelines for proper disposal (www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)
- Distribution of these outreach materials to local pharmacies
- An Erie Times-News in Education page dedicated to pharmaceutical waste in the water
- Several newspaper articles advertising the event
- A “pre-event” survey question posted in the Erie Times News which resulted in 685 responses
- Partnering with the WJET-TV 24 Erie Green Campaign
- Disbursement of a press release to all local media outlets
- Holding a News Conference prior to the collection event
- Posting on the Earth 911 website

Pre-registration for the collection event was preferred; however, was not required. At the collection event, residents were able to drop off their unused or expired medications as well as personal care products free of charge. Participants’ on-site time was very brief; they were asked to show their medications to the pharmacist for approval before they were accepted, and to fill out a short survey.

Acceptable items included:

- Prescription Medication
- Over-the-Counter Medication
- Ointments
- Creams
- Vials
- Pet Medications
- Personal Care products

Items not accepted included:

- Illegal drugs

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- Bio-hazardous Material
- Needles/sharps
- Inhalers and under pressure items
- Household Hazardous Waste (paint, pesticides, oil, gas)

All controlled substances were identified, separated out, inventoried, and then placed in the possession of City of Erie Law enforcement officials. Non-controlled substances were sorted, counted, logged into computers, and placed in hazardous waste containers provided by Environmental Coordination Services and Recycling (ECS&R).

Collection Site:

The one time collection event took place at the Cruise Boat Terminal building behind the Blasco library in downtown Erie, Pennsylvania. Residents could drop off their medications anytime between 10 am-2 pm.

Key Motivation:

The main motivators for this project are environmental. The Great Lakes are under constant stress from many forms of pollution. Pharmaceutical waste in the water is an emerging concern in the Great Lakes region and our goals were:

- 1.) To increase knowledge of Erie citizens about the impact improper disposal of pharmaceuticals may have on Lake Erie water quality.
- 2.) To increase the knowledge of Erie citizens about how to properly dispose of medication and prevent pharmaceuticals from contaminating the Lake Erie ecosystem.
- 3.) To decrease the number of toxic substances present in the streams, riparian habitats, and tributaries leading into the Great Lakes.

Organizing Body:

Pennsylvania Sea Grant along with its partners the City of Erie, Lake Erie-Allegheny Earth Force, LECOM school of Pharmacy, and Erie Times-News in Education.

Partners:

The following organizations teamed up with the above organizing body members to make the collection program a success.

- Community Health Net
- Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Environmental Coordination Services and Recycling (ECS&R)
- Erie County Environmental Coalition
- Erie Center on Health and Aging
- Erie County Health Department
- Erie Housing Authority
- Erie Port Authority
- Erie Wastewater Treatment Facility
- Local Pharmacies

- Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC)
- Hamot Medical Center
- Lake Erie Sierra Club
- Local Senior centers
- Pennsylvania Lake Erie Watershed Association
- Presque Isle Audubon
- State Board of Pharmacy
- USDEA local agent
- Visiting Nurses Association
- WJET-TV 24 Erie Green Campaign

Level of Implementation:

This event was organized at the city level but was intended to serve residents from the surrounding areas as well.

Cost:

The cost of this program was provided by a one-year grant from EPA totaling \$24, 931.

Outcome:

A total of 87 residents participated in the collection event, 61 of whom were unregistered and 89% of whom were over the age of 46. A total of 120 gallons of material was collected, 5 gallons of which were controlled substances. Approximately 70,000 non-controlled pills, 4,000 controlled pills, and 400 personal care products were collected during the event.

Lessons Learned:

1. Know all agency players up front in order to ensure requirements are met. In Pennsylvania this included EPA Region 3 (with assistance from Region 5), Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.
2. Be prepared for a bumpy ride if pharmaceutical and personal care product collections are not the norm in your area. Our event included many stops and starts which we overcame through perseverance and professionalism. Agency staff may have to work through the process using your event as a test case. Including the waste hauler in conversations with agency staff was very helpful. They ‘spoke the lingo’ and were able to address agency staff’s concerns.
3. Advertise in many venues as often as possible. Partnering with the local newspaper was invaluable. Two-thirds of those who responded to our survey had heard about the event through the newspaper.
4. Involve local legislators in the event. A representative from the PA House attended the event and got a firsthand look at what was collected and where it came from. He also heard how happy people were to have an environmentally-friendly option for drug disposal.

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