

Canada-British Columbia

Program Overview: The pharmaceutical industry established the Medications Return Program (MRP), formerly called British Columbia EnviRx, in November 1996. It began as a voluntary program, but the industry eventually requested that pharmaceutical stewardship be made mandatory through its inclusion in the Post-Consumer Residuals Stewardship Regulation. This ongoing program is administrated by the Residuals Management Group Ltd. with funding from the Post-Consumer Pharmaceutical Stewardship Association. Both urban and rural pharmacies are participating. The user-friendliness of the program is key to its success with an easy and on-demand pick-up schedule. Returned pharmaceuticals are tracked through shipping labels to ensure safety.

The MRP accepts all prescription drugs, nonprescription medicine, herbal products, vitamin and mineral supplements, and throat lozenges. It does not accept sharps, cosmetics, antiperspirants, antiseptic and medicated skin care products, contact lens disinfectants, sunscreens, mouthwashes and toothpastes. Also, physicians' offices and hospitals are not permitted to use this program; it is expected that they will contract with reverse distributors or otherwise take responsibility for the disposal of their unneeded medicines.

For more information on the Medications Return Program, please refer to www.medicationsreturn.ca.

Sites: A total of 856 pharmacies throughout British Columbia participate in this national program; these pharmacies are located in both rural and urban areas.

Key Motivation: The MRP derives from a true “cradle to cradle” philosophy in that “ecology of health” is the central focus. The MRP was formed to balance the concerns and objectives for ensuring or improving the health of the environment, consumer, and economy. The MRP has been embraced by Canada's National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) for a number of reasons, including consumer/child safety (accidental poisonings, unwitting consumption of expired product or product prescribed for someone else), reduced costs (encouraging purchase of manageable drug amounts that are fully consumed), improved therapeutic outcomes, and reduced potential for environmental damage.

Organizing Body: The Medications Return Program is administrated by the Residuals Management Group Ltd.

Partners: The MRP is also administered by the Post-Consumers Pharmaceutical Stewardship Association (PCPSA) and funded by brand owners with the support of the Canada's Research Based Pharmaceutical Companies (R & D), Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association (CGPA), NDMAD Advancing Canadian self-care, and other brand owners not affiliated with these associations.

Level of Implementation: The Medications Return Program has been implemented on a national level. However, each province has taken a slightly different approach to the issue and allows different types of pharmaceutical products to be collected. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island have taken the lead on the MRP.

Cost: The total cost of the Medications Return Program is US \$170,500 per year or US \$3.25 per pound of unwanted pharmaceutical waste. In order to ensure consumers are not discouraged from properly disposing of their waste medications, brand-owners are not permitted under the regulation to charge any fees to return regulated product residuals. The pharmaceuticals industry has chosen to fund the program directly and no fees are assessed to consumers at the point of sale.

Outcome: For the period April 2000 to December 2000, industry reports that over 550 retail pharmacy outlets, representing over 75% of all pharmacies in British Columbia, accepted unwanted and expired medications from consumers. For the same nine-month period, the program collected 9878 pounds for a four-year program total of 72,107 pounds.

In 2001, the MRP was revised, and the re-launch included a new communications plan that included consumer brochures and posters for pharmacies. Improved public awareness has resulted in an increase of residual medications being returned to participating pharmacies. Since the re-launch of the program, the volumes collected have grown by 35%. In 2004, the program, which serves approximately 4 million people, collected 52,800 pounds of unwanted pharmaceuticals, or 43 million pills. In 2005, 39,600 pounds of medications were collected under the program.

Contacts: Recycling Hotline of British Columbia
 Greater Vancouver (604) 732-9253
 Outside Greater Vancouver 1 (800) 667-4321