

Earth Keeper Initiative, Upper Peninsula, Michigan

Program Overview: The Earth Keeper Initiative is a coalition of faith communities in Michigan's Upper Peninsula taking action to protect the environment. Nine faiths have joined the Earth Keeper coalition, including more than 140 congregations in the Upper Peninsula: Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Jewish, Buddhist, Bahai, Unitarian and Presbyterian. Earth Keeper is a project of the Superior Watershed Partnership, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the rivers and watersheds of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

On Earth Day 2007, the Earth Keepers organized a multi-site medicine cabinet clean sweep event for the public. This was their third clean sweep event designed to allow the public to dispose of hazardous materials safely. In past years the Earth Keeper group had held collections for discarded electronics (over 300 tons collected in one day) and other household hazardous waste such as batteries, paint and cleaning products (over 45 tons collected in one day).

The event was publicized through church bulletins, e-mail networks, and local media (TV, radio, newspapers). In addition, the event planners wrote a weekly news article about the collection that was published in local newspapers for 8 weeks leading up to the event. Earth Keeper's media representative distributed press releases to local and regional news outlets. The group developed a [publicity flyer](#) that is included in section 4 of this resource kit and was also adapted for use by the Sangamon County collection event in Illinois.

At each collection site, qualified pharmacists inventoried the controlled drugs. Law enforcement officials from the state and local police as well as the Sheriff's Office were on site to provide security and take custody of the controlled substances that were collected. 400 volunteers from the various religious communities and from nearby universities and from Thrivent Financial staffed the collection sites.

Participants in the drop-off received fact sheets instructing them on how to dispose of medicines safely in the future, since this was a single-day collection.

The collected medicines were destroyed in a hazardous waste incinerator in St. Louis, MO.

Collection Sites: Nineteen sites across all fifteen counties in Michigan's Upper Peninsula hosted collections. Most of the collections were held at churches, while a few were at other sites such as a medical center and a Salvation Army location.

Key Motivation: According to a pastor of one of the churches involved, "This was a wonderful event – a perfect marriage of two concerns – care of the environment and the need to remove drugs that might otherwise be abused from the community."

Organizing Body: Earth Keeper Initiative in conjunction with the Cedar Tree Institute and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community.

Partners:

Upper Peninsula Chapter of the Michigan Pharmacists Association

Michigan DEA
Michigan Sheriff's Association
Michigan State Police
Police departments from participating towns and counties
Thrivent Financial for Lutherans
Students from Northern Michigan University, Michigan Tech, Finlandia University and Lake Superior State University
U.S. Senator Carl Levin's Office
Northern Michigan University Environmental Science Program
400 volunteers organized and staffed the collection events

Level of Implementation: Collections were held simultaneously in all 15 counties across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. After the event, the collected medicines from all the sites were consolidated into a single truck belonging to the waste hauling/disposal contractor.

Cost: Waste transport and disposal was contracted for \$20,000. There were also extensive planning and logistical staff and support time costs. These costs as well as publicity expenses were covered through grants from U.S. EPA and from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. Earth Keepers received grant money from the Lake Superior Lakewide Management Plan along with a CARE grant (Community Action for a Renewed Environment) from U.S. EPA.

Pharmacists and law enforcement officials supported the event through in-kind donations of their time and expertise to handle the controlled substances.

Thrivent and church partners provided free refreshments for the public at all 19 collection sites.

Locations and basic site equipment such as tables were in-kind loans from Earth Keeper member congregations.

Outcome: About 2,000 people showed up to turn in a total of more than one ton of unwanted medicines during the single-day event. Controlled substances with an estimated street value of half a million dollars were collected and safely destroyed to prevent abuse.

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