



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

DATE: March 21, 2019
TO: Honorable Andrea Salinas, Chair of the House Health Care Committee
FROM: Aaron Knott, Legislative Director
SUBJECT: HB 3273: Prescription Drug Take-Back Program

This testimony is presented in support of HB 3273.

Background

Pharmaceuticals improperly stored in the home or disposed in the trash may end up in the hands of children, teenagers and potential abusers. In fact, more than 71,000 children under the age of 19 present to emergency rooms each year for unintentional overdoses of prescription and over the counter drugs. Most adolescents and adults reporting recent nonmedical use of opioid medications obtain these medications through their family or friends.¹ A lack of safe disposal options contributes to the national drug abuse epidemic that is now the leading cause of injury death in the U.S., ahead of car accidents.

Moreover, when flushed or thrown away, pharmaceuticals end up in our waterways, also harming the ecosystem and potentially affecting sources of drinking water. Pharmaceutical compounds can leach from lined landfills and can seep into groundwater from unlined landfills. Wastewater treatment plants and septic systems usually do not treat or only partially treat pharmaceuticals, so chemical compounds from these drugs pass through treatment plants or septic systems to rivers or groundwater.

Pharmaceuticals are present in Oregon's water. A 2000 U.S. Geological Survey study found detectible levels of pharmaceuticals and other microcontaminates in Oregon streams, including the Tualatin River, Zollner Creek near Mt. Angel, and the Willamette River near Swan Island. A 2005 study in La Pine detected 8 pharmaceuticals (of 18 tested for) in La Pine's groundwater, which is the community's sole source of drinking water. When pharmaceuticals enter the environment, they can also negatively impact water quality and fish and wildlife species. While further study of the environmental impacts of pharmaceuticals is needed, scientists have already made a number of striking findings:

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: mental health findings. Published 2014.

<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHmhfr2013/NSDUHmhfr2013.pdf>

- A large body of evidence has linked synthetic estrogen, which is used in birth control pills, with endocrine disruption and excess feminization in fish. In an experimental Canadian lake, synthetic estrogen exposure devastated the fathead minnow population and led to a decline in the overall biomass and abundance of lake trout, for which the minnows were a primary food source.
<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2013.0578>
- Experiments have demonstrated that antidepressants, benzodiazepines (psychiatric drugs), and antihistamines can induce behavioral changes in fish at concentrations close to those found in the environment.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4213591/>
- At the low levels of exposure expected in the environment, the common antidepressant fluoxetine (Prozac®) led starlings to feed less often during their key foraging times.
<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2013.0575>

Concept

As attorneys for the State of Oregon, the Department of Justice advises agencies that are responsible for protecting our natural resources and environment. In recent years we have also played a key role in Oregon and nationwide in fighting the opioid epidemic which is arguably among greatest public health crises in modern history. Prescription drug take-back programs are beneficial to both of these efforts.

HB 3273 would minimize the impact of unused prescription drugs on Oregon's environment and public health by requiring manufacturers to develop and implement a take-back program. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is charged with administering the requirements of the bill.

By providing a convenient and secure disposal method for consumers, HB 3273 would cut the quantities of pharmaceutical drugs entering Oregon's surface water, groundwater and landfills, thus reducing negative environmental impacts. It will also help keep pharmaceutical drugs out of the wrong hands.

Contact: Aaron Knott, Legislative Director, aaron.d.knott@doj.state.or.us or (503) 798-0987