

# Program to collect old meds nets 126,000 pills

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The Rochester area's first collection of unused consumer medicine exceeded its goal by a huge margin, with 126,000 pills turned in that otherwise could have wound up in area waters or landfills.

The goal set for the collection days — one in April, the other last Saturday — was 20,000 pills.

“The actual result of more than six times that amount is truly outstanding,” said George Thomas, executive director of the Center for Environmental Information in Rochester, which used a federal grant to coordinate the two collection events.

The underlying purpose of the collection was to divert consumer antibiotics, steroids, painkillers and other medicines from the area's waste stream.

For years, the advice had been to flush unwanted medicine down the toilet or throw it in the trash. But increasingly, environmental groups and regulators are concerned about the effect on lakes and rivers where traces of discarded drugs wind up.

Thomas spoke about the collection program at a conference Thursday sponsored by the Lake Ontario Coastal Initiative, an affiliate of the environmental center and other groups.

He said consumers also dropped off 42,000 pounds of unwanted electronic equipment such as computers or cell phones, more than four times the target set in advance.

A Brockport company recycled the e-waste. Pharmaceuticals, including thousands of doses of controlled substances, were incinerated under police supervision, he said.

Sara Pesek, another speaker at the conference in Sodus Point, Wayne County, said there is no conclusive evidence of ill effects on people from the tiny concentrations of pharmaceuticals found in drinking water.

Some new research suggests the possibility of health-related impacts, and there is evidence of effects on fish and other wildlife, said Pesek, from the Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University.

She noted that the United States lags behind Australia and many European nations that have had waste drug collection programs for years.

Thomas said Monroe County, which ran the April collection, is planning a broader event this fall.

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