

Proper drug disposal promoted through local event

National Take Back Day, a drug collection event sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration, will help area residents responsibly rid of unused or unwanted medication on Saturday, April 26.

Prescriptions for disposal will be accepted at Shawnee Mall's center court, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Lisa Watson, Strategic Prevention Framework SIG Coordinator at Gateway to Prevention and Recovery, said the biannual event is returning to Shawnee for a third consecutive year, in efforts to collect drugs no longer needed or necessary.

"They weigh the number collected. Last year we collected 15 pounds and, at the event previous to that, 30 pounds," Watson said.

She said lack of proper advertisement affected last year's participation, but this year's event has been well promoted. She hopes the event will raise awareness of the importance of discarding prescriptions properly.

"We just want to get drugs off the street, so people aren't sharing or stealing as much," Watson said.

Locally, drugs continue to land in the wrong hands.

"Oklahoma is number five in the nation, as far as prescription drug use, and Pottawatomie is the number four county in the State of Oklahoma," Watson said.

The problem is often a result of innocent intentions.

"A lot of times we'll have someone whose spouse or parent died, and they just didn't know what to do with the drugs," Watson said.

Attempting to dispose of drugs at home can carry additional consequences.

"Flushing them down the toilet, environmentally, that's not safe," Watson said.

Law enforcement will be present at the event and will transport collected drugs to a DEA office. Watson said volunteers are always needed to sit with law enforcement and help educate the public about the potential for medication misuse.

"Across the nation, there's a big problem with prescription drug abuse," Watson said. "The primary purpose is to reduce overdose deaths from opiate drugs."

For details on volunteer opportunities, contact Watson at 405-275-3391, ext. 107.