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Groups Call on Pharmaceutical Companies to Collect and Dispose of Unused Medicines *DEA Take-back Day Highlights Need for Sustainable Programs*

October 27, 2011 – This Saturday, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) will coordinate with thousands of law enforcement agencies around the country to collect unused medications. The DEA-coordinated events highlight the type of collections taking place every day across the country in response to serious concerns about prescription drug abuse, accidental poisonings, aquatic impacts, and pollution of our nation’s waterways. The cost of these programs falls on governments and non-profit organizations. The most effective long-term solution is for pharmaceutical companies to take greater responsibility for financing and managing these programs.

“Pharmaceutical companies make important products that can improve and extend people’s lives,” said Scott Cassel, CEO of the Product Stewardship Institute, “However, they need to engage with those seeking to reduce the negative impacts from their products so that the true cost of these products is internalized and viable solutions are developed.”

“The secure collection and disposal of unwanted medications is a key part of our drug abuse prevention strategy,” said Sheriff John Lovick from Snohomish County, Washington. “We collected nearly three thousand pounds of medicines in 2010, and need a partnership with the drug industry to keep these collections going.”

Pharmaceutical companies have run the collection programs for unwanted medications in British Columbia since 1996, and in Manitoba since 2010, and financially supported programs in other Canadian provinces. But many of these same companies have opposed similar legislation that would put the onus on them to provide programs here in the U.S. Pharmaceuticals have been responsible for unintended public safety and environmental impacts. Unintentional prescription drug overdoses now kill more Americans than overdoses of cocaine and heroin combined. Unlike illicit drugs, most abusers of prescription drugs report obtaining them from a friend or relative. At the same time, the U.S. Geological Survey has found that 80 percent of streams and 93 percent of groundwater tested were contaminated with at least one pharmaceutical compound.

“Pharmaceutical collection programs are an important part of our members' efforts to protect our water resources,” said David Ullrich, Executive Director of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, which works with 82 cities in the U.S. and Canada. “Our cities need programs that have sustainable funding, which is why we called for pharmaceutical producer responsibility two years ago.”

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Product Stewardship Institute, Inc. (PSI) is a national non-profit environmental institute with membership from 47 states, more than 200 local governments, and over 75 businesses, organizations, universities, and non-U.S. governments. For examples of pharmaceutical take-back programs: www.takebacknetwork.com, and for information on product stewardship: www.productstewardship.us.

Snohomish County, WA

Snohomish County's Secure Medicine Disposal program is viewed as a national model and has recently received recognition from the WA State Association of Local Public Health Officials and North American Hazardous Materials Management Association. For more information: http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Public_Works/Divisions/SolidWaste/TakeItBack/pharmsnoco.htm.

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