

Massachusetts mandates drug take-back program

New law requires manufacturers to finance and manage safe disposal program for leftover medications.

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Recycling Today Staff



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Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker has made Massachusetts the first state in the nation to require drug companies to safely dispose of unwanted medications as part of a comprehensive drug abuse prevention strategy when he signed the bill [H.4056, An Act Relative to Substance Use, Treatment, Education and Prevention](#), into law.

"An important goal of this comprehensive bill was to get every part of our health care system involved in reducing the misuse of opiate pills," said Sen. John F. Keenan, who first introduced the drug stewardship legislation. He is vice chair of a special Senate committee formed to address the state's opioid problem. "Today, for the first time, we are saying that pharmaceutical manufacturers cannot just profit from this epidemic but must play an active role in ending it. I am very proud that Massachusetts has taken this step."

More than \$1 billion in leftover drugs are thrown in the trash, flushed or consigned to medicine cabinets each year. Drugs left in the home can get into the hands of children and potential addicts. Prescription drug abuse is the fastest-growing drug problem in the U.S. Last year, Massachusetts had 1,256 accidental drug-related deaths. When flushed or put in the trash, over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs can potentially contaminate waterways and the drinking water supply.

"Our research has shown that pharmaceuticals from household wastewater end up in our waterways and ultimately our drinking water supplies," said Laurel Schaidler, research scientist at the [Silent Spring Institute](#), Newton, Massachusetts. "Preventing unwanted and expired medications from being thrown out or flushed down the drain will help keep pharmaceuticals out of the environment, and drug take-back programs can accomplish this goal."

"We applaud Massachusetts for recognizing that drug companies are responsible for safely managing leftover medicine and that this is a key element in reducing drug abuse," says Scott Cassel, chief executive officer of the Boston-based [Product Stewardship Institute](#) (PSI), which has promoted drug take back nationwide for the past decade. "This law will save money for Massachusetts governments, which traditionally bear the burden of paying for proper disposal. It will also cover the cost of safe medication disposal, including at local pharmacies that are pillars of our communities."

Since 2012, seven counties on the West Coast—six in California (Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Marin) and one in Washington (King)—passed laws that

shift the cost burden for collecting and properly managing prescription drugs to drug makers. These laws will serve to guide the Massachusetts Department of Public Health as it develops rules and regulations to implement the new state law so that it is effective, PSI says.