

Landmark DEC Report Calls for Pharmaceutical Industry to Fund Safe Drug Disposal in New York State Citizens Campaign for the Environment Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

LANDMARK DEC REPORT CALLS FOR PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY TO FUND SAFE DRUG DISPOSAL IN NEW YORK STATE

Groups applaud critical DEC report--call for legislature to pass Drug Take Back Act before end of session; Safe drug disposal of unused and expired prescription drugs critical to address opioid crisis and protect waters from contamination

Albany, NY—A coalition of environmental, public health, and product stewardship organizations are praising the Governor and DEC for their recently released report (available at dontflushyourdrugs.net), which calls for a robust, statewide safe pharmaceutical disposal program that is funded by the pharmaceutical industry. Governor Cuomo called for the report when he vetoed a poorly crafted pharmaceutical disposal bill that passed the legislature last year. Bipartisan state legislation, known as the Drug Take Back Act (S.7354 –Hannon / A.9576a – Gunther), which would establish a statewide safe drug disposal program funded by the pharmaceutical industry, is pending* in the Senate and Assembly. The groups are calling on the legislature to pass agreed upon legislation before the end of session.

Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment said, “The Governor got it right—the pharmaceutical industry must take responsibility for its waste, not the taxpayers. It seems that wherever researchers look for drugs in our waters, they are now finding it. We expect the shellfish and finfish we eat to be a source of nutrition, not opioids. There is a grave urgency to provide all New Yorkers with safe and convenient options for drug disposal, which the Drug Take Back Act will provide. We are counting on the Senate and Assembly to work together and get the bill passed this session.”

Emerging science is demonstrating that pharmaceutical drugs that are flushed are polluting our waters and adversely impacting aquatic life. A 2017 study of the Niagara River found high levels of antidepressants in brains of numerous fish. A 2016 study by Riverkeeper found 16 different pharmaceutical compounds, including those to treat blood pressure, cholesterol, and epilepsy, in the Hudson River. Most recently a study conducted by the Puget Sound Institute discovered trace amounts of oxycodone in bay mussels—the first time that opioids have been found in shellfish.

Dan Shapley, Water Quality Program Director for Riverkeeper said, “Riverkeeper thanks the Governor and the DEC for joining advocates in calling for a safe and convenient drug take back program funded by the pharmaceutical industry. With our partners at Cornell University and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we have conducted first-of-their-kind surveys of pharmaceuticals in the Hudson River Estuary. We have detected 50 different pharmaceutical compounds, with greater numbers found in samples at or near municipal wastewater treatment plant outfalls. Unfortunately, Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove pharmaceuticals from the water before discharge. We strongly encourage the Assembly and Senate to pass the bipartisan Drug Take Back Act before the end of session.”

Marcia Bystryn, President of the New York League of Conservation Voters, said, “We are facing an environmental and health crisis due to the improper disposal of pharmaceutical drugs. Flushing and throwing away unused drugs can cause water contamination and negatively impacts public health. A safe pharmaceutical disposal program would improve our water quality and we urge our state legislators in Albany to implement such a program before this session ends.”

A lack of options to safely dispose of unused drugs is contributing to the national drug abuse epidemic that is now the leading cause of injury death in the U.S., ahead of car accidents. Deaths from drug overdoses and chronic drug abuse in New York State have increased 71 percent between 2010 and 2015.

Andrew Radin, Chair of the New York Product Stewardship Council and Recycling Director for Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency said, “Over 2,000 people in New York die annually from opioid overdose, most commonly from prescription pain relievers. Because 70 percent of people who start misusing drugs get them from the homes of family and friends, the Drug Take-Back Act will save lives by stopping prescription drug abuse at its source.”

“The DEC report is an important step for New York that fully aligns with an increasing number of governments across the U.S. that require pharmaceutical companies to fund and manage safe drug take-back programs,” **said Scott Cassel, Chief Executive Officer of the Product Stewardship Institute.** “Passing a bill will establish New York as a national leader in protecting water quality from improperly disposed medications and addressing the opioid addiction issue head on.”

The report is available at www.dontflushyourdrugs.net

*Senate passed the Drug Take Back Act in April, although the bill was recalled to the Senate, as the Senate and Assembly bills are not same as. The Assembly bill currently sits in the Codes committee.

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Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE) empowers communities and advocates solutions for our shared environment and public health and is supported by over 80,000 members throughout New York State and Connecticut. www.citizenscampaign.org

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