



## Media Contacts

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## Wisconsin Communities Seek Long-term Drug Collection Programs *Vision for Future Pharmaceutical Collection Programs Outlined*

**November 9, 2011** – The Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) recently became the first group to endorse a vision for pharmaceutical drug collection and disposal programs for the Great Lakes Region. Pharmaceutical collection programs, including collection events like those coordinated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration around the country on October 29, are growing due 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.

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.

“We are excited to take the step of describing a vision for drug collection and disposal programs that will be convenient for the public, protect public health and safety and the environment, and be financially sustainable,” said AROW President Jennifer Semrau. “Someday, we would like to see pharmaceutical collection programs that mirror the effectiveness of Wisconsin’s electronics stewardship program, which AROW worked hard to enact in 2009.”

The [document](#), entitled “Key Elements of Pharmaceutical Collection and Disposal Programs: A Vision for the Great Lakes Region,” was developed with input from government officials and organizations in states around the Great Lakes. The document sets out a vision for the future in which all residents have access to convenient, secure pharmaceutical disposal programs. The document also describes a future where those who benefit from the manufacture, sale, and use of pharmaceutical drugs have the greatest responsibility for ensuring program success. In the document, pharmaceutical companies are targeted to fund the expansion of existing programs or create and sustain new infrastructure.

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

“Significant progress has been made to establish safe and secure medicine collection and disposal programs in the Great Lakes Region,” said Steve Brachman of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, who has been a lead on the project. “While we have had great success piloting a mail-back program in Wisconsin, the next step is to get a permanent program in place. Ultimately it shouldn’t just be government’s problem to solve. We hope to work with the industry to develop solutions.” Due primarily to funding constraints, many programs are unable to fully meet the needs of residents throughout the region.

**Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW)** is a non-profit professional organization that provides statewide proactive leadership on waste reduction and recycling through education, advocacy, collaboration, programs and services. AROW has a policy in support of product stewardship and an active Product Stewardship Committee. For more information: [www.arow-online.org](http://www.arow-online.org)

**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](http://www.takebacknetwork.com), and for information on product stewardship: [www.productstewardship.us](http://www.productstewardship.us).

**The University of Wisconsin-Extension** provides statewide access to university resources and research so the people of Wisconsin can learn, grow and succeed at all stages of life. UW-Extension has recently introduced a new medication disposal program called "Get the Meds Out." This is a grant-funded program that provides free mail-back envelopes to residents of the 36 Wisconsin Great Lakes watershed counties. For more information: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/pharma/get-the-meds-out-program/>

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