

Adrienne J. Tissier

Member • Board of Supervisors • San Mateo County

For Immediate Release

Contact:
Bill Chiang 650-363-4042

SMCo Pharmaceutical Disposal Program earns California's top environmental award

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. (Nov. 25, 2008) – The two-year-old San Mateo County Pharmaceutical Disposal Program has received a 2008 Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award. GEELA is California's highest environmental honor, presented by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the Resources Agency. The county was one of 21 award recipients selected from 119 applicants in eight categories.

"This award also belongs to the sheriff's office and to the 12 city police departments that make this program not just successful, but a statewide and nationwide model," said San Mateo County Sup. Adrienne J. Tissier, who created the program in 2006. "This tremendous, yet voluntary, partnership is a public-service trifecta: helping the public avoid medication errors at home, preventing or reducing recreational prescription drug use, while simultaneously protecting our ecosystems. It's an unquestionable and proven win-win-win."

The San Mateo County Pharmaceutical Disposal Program has 13 secured, marked bins at 13 law enforcement sites countywide, where anyone can walk in and anonymously deposit their expired or otherwise unwanted medicines, including those defined as controlled substances. A licensed disposal company then removes the discarded drugs for proper incineration.

Since the San Mateo County program launched in September 2006, through the end of September 2008, the total volume collected has exceeded 9,190 pounds – nearly 4.6 tons diverted from solid-waste and wastewater streams. Recent news reports underscored what many environmental watchdogs have long suspected, that myriad pills flushed down myriad drains were slowly contaminating rivers and streams, and linked to mutations in certain species of fish and amphibians.

"The evidence is mounting that, if we don't do something, an environmental crisis is inevitable," Tissier added. "Imagine where we'd be if we established environmental regulations in the 1930s, or if we started working on alternative fuels 50 or 75 years ago. In terms of pharmaceuticals in our water supply, we must continue to champion this effort."

In 2007, the San Mateo County program received an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties, plus an Honorable Mention from the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board in connection with that agency's first-ever Dr. Teng-Chung Wu P2 Award, intended to promote excellence in pollution prevention.

(More)

400 County Center, Redwood City, California 94063

Direct Line (650) 363-4572 • Fax (650) 599-1027

Until recently, San Mateo's County's program was unique in California as well as nationally. In March 2008, the city of Bentonville, Ark., launched its program, and in October 2008, the city of Camarillo, Calif., (Ventura County), unveiled its program; both are based on San Mateo County's model. Tissier's office still receives weekly telephone or e-mail inquiries from jurisdictions across the country asking for details regarding the disposal program.

Created in 1993, GEELA is administered by Cal/EPA and the Resources Agency in collaboration with the State and Consumer Services Agency, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. The award program recognizes individuals, organizations and businesses that have demonstrated exceptional leadership for voluntary achievements in conserving California's resources, protecting and enhancing the environment and building public-private partnerships.

For more information on GEELA and this year's award recipients, please visit Cal/EPA online: <http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Awards/GEELA/>.

###