

Adrienne J. Tissier

Member • Board of Supervisors • San Mateo County

For Immediate Release

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SMCo launches permanent program for pharmaceutical disposal

Sup. Tissier spearheads senior-services, environmental and law-enforcement trifecta

REDWOOD CITY, Calif., (Sept. 15, 2006) – Led by Sup. Adrienne J. Tissier, San Mateo County has created a convenient way for the proper disposal of expired or otherwise unwanted pharmaceuticals. Starting immediately, anyone can take unwanted medicines to three participating Peninsula police departments: Daly City, Pacifica and San Bruno, plus a fourth site at the sheriff's office inside the county's Hall of Justice in Redwood City.

The program's three main goals, Tissier explained, are to help seniors avoid dangerous medication errors, help reduce or prevent recreational pharmaceutical use and to help stop the continuing contamination of the environment by human medicines flushed down countless drains every day.

"Most people don't realize that most sewage treatment plants are not designed to filter out medicines," Tissier added. "So everything from antibiotics to the hormones found in birth control pills is showing up in fish and amphibians.

"Plus, seniors have all these pills in their medicine cabinets and could easily take the wrong one by mistake," she said. "And the law enforcement community already knows that drug abusers are raiding household cabinets looking for pills. This program is an effort to address all three issues – a win-win-win."

All medicines should remain in their original containers, with any private, identifiable information removed. San Mateo County's pharmaceutical disposal program does not accept illegal substances, such as marijuana, ecstasy or methamphetamines.

The disposal receptacles were placed with law enforcement agencies because that was the only way to create a program able to accept ALL pharmaceuticals, including those defined as controlled substances.

"The ability to take controlled substances makes our program a unique first in the Bay Area," Tissier said. "And credit goes to the three participating police chiefs and to Sheriff Don Horsley for stepping up and providing this service to the community. Other counties have had similar efforts, some temporary some more long-term, but as far as we can tell, San Mateo County is the first to legally accept ALL medicines."

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Establishing a convenient, countywide pharmaceutical disposal program was among Tissier's first tasks soon after she took office in January 2005 as the county supervisor from District 5, which includes Daly City, Brisbane, Colma, Broadmoor and portions of South San Francisco and San Bruno. She first recognized the need when her father passed in spring 2004 and left a large quantity of prescription drugs.

"There wasn't a specific place to take unwanted or expired medication," Tissier recalled. "There are places for paints and solvents and motor oils and fluorescent bulbs, even batteries, but for medicines, the most common answer was to flush it and I already knew that was a bad idea."

During Earth Week 2005, Tissier headed the county's first-ever effort to divert pharmaceuticals away from landfills and the wastewater stream. Collection sites in 13 Peninsula cities during April 18-22, 2005, took in approximately 235 pounds of various medicines ranging from common, over-the-counter remedies to powerful prescriptions.

Under the current program, the Daly City, Pacifica and San Bruno police departments have agreed to accept the discarded drugs and transport them on a regular basis to a secured county law enforcement facility where a licensed hazardous waste collector will remove them for incineration.

"The public need definitely exists," Tissier added. "I hope we can expand the program to every community on the Peninsula that has a police department."

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