

# PREScription DRUG TASK FORCE

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES  
2012 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS SUBMISSION

## Got Drugs?

Turn in your unused or expired  
medications for safe disposal.

**Saturday, April 28, 2012**  
**10 am - 2 pm**

Roanoke Civic Center • Salem at the K-Mart on Main Street  
Botetourt County - at the Daleville Kroger  
Roanoke County - at the Tanglewood Kroger  
Roanoke County Public Safety Building - Cove Road  
Roanoke County Fire Station #1 - Hershberger Road  
Vinton - at the Hardy Road Kroger



Submitted by:

Roanoke County, Virginia on behalf of the Western Virginia Water  
Authority & Partners in this Regional Initiative

# PRESCRIPTION DRUG TASK FORCE

WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT AND OUR YOUTH  
FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES

To help protect the quality of life in our regional community, local law enforcement officers from the City of Roanoke and Roanoke County, the Roanoke Area Youth Substance Abuse Coalition (RAYSAC) and the Western Virginia Water Authority (Authority) formed a **regional partnership** to address the environmental and health risks associated with the improper disposal and misuse of prescription drugs. What evolved from that partnership has proven to be an extremely successful program – one with far-reaching benefits in the community. Roanoke County did not create this partnership, but as an active participant, recognizes the positive impact and value this program has had on the community; thus, felt it important to share this program with other counties and law enforcement agencies throughout Virginia.

## ***BACKGROUND:***

Although this effort started in late 2010, the Roanoke region has greatly benefited from the significant efforts made by this partnership in the past year. From the beginning, law enforcement officers and RAYSAC were concerned about prescription drug abuse among youth. Prescription drug misuse can lead to overdose, addiction and even death. National reports show that an increasing number of youth are getting drugs from family members or friends who have unsecured prescription medications in their homes. As the region's water and wastewater service provider, the Authority wanted to protect our valley's waterways. Although testing indicated that the treated wastewater from the Authority's Regional Water Pollution Control Plant did not contain a diverse or large quantity of prescription drugs, news reports indicated that this was a growing issue in our nation. By working together in a collaborative manner, the partnership has been proactive in educating citizens across multiple

jurisdictions in the Roanoke Valley about the risks associated with prescription drug misuse and the benefits to the environment of proper medication disposal.

In September 2010, the Authority and RAYSAC worked with a local television station (WDBJ7) to conduct a random phone poll of valley residents to determine their knowledge of prescription drug abuse as well as their knowledge of proper medication disposal (see attachment 1). This survey served as important base-line data so that the results of all future efforts could be accurately measured. As expected, 83% of 18 – 24 year olds responded that Rx abuse is a big problem or somewhat of a problem. In fact, 57.6% of females and 55.8% of males found it very or fairly easy to access prescription drugs. When asked how they dispose of unused or expired medications, 54% of all the entire population surveyed thought that flushing meds can leave traces of pharmaceuticals in the drinking water; however, 48% of those respondents ages 18 and older reported that they would flush Rx to dispose of them (100% of 18-24 year olds). In fact, only 18% of all of those that responded would dispose of Rx appropriately by crushing, sealing them in plastic bags and putting them in the trash. This base-line data suggested that the residents of the Roanoke Valley needed to receive education about the risks of leaving unsecured pharmaceuticals in the home and the appropriate disposal of the prescription medications.

In September 2010, RAYSAC and the Authority partnered to participate in the first annual National DEA Drug Take Back at one site in the City of Roanoke. With only two week's notice, a total of 234 pounds of prescription drugs were collected, and the site was the largest collection site in Virginia. Although this first event was considered a success, we knew that much more could be done in our community if an intergovernmental and community wide approach was taken to bring awareness to this critical issue.

RAYSAC and the Authority established the Roanoke Valley Prescription Drug Task Force in November 2010 to provide the leadership to develop a community-wide strategic plan to address the environmental and health issues surrounding Rx disposal and misuse. Knowing that this was an issue that touched many groups in the community, representatives from local law enforcement agencies, environmental agencies, health care, youth serving agencies and concerned community members were gathered to focus on educating multiple audiences within the community about the risks involved with prescription medications and the need and methods of proper drug disposal (see attachment 2). The Authority donated meeting space, promotional design services and printing while RAYSAC used grant funds to obtain the quantitative data from the phone surveys. Since its inception, the Task Force has been instrumental in developing local solutions for our regional community and continues to meet quarterly to promote safe drug disposal methods and increase awareness of prescription drug abuse in our communities.

The Prescription Drug Task Force, in partnership with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Roanoke County Prevention Council, and police departments in cities of Roanoke and Salem and the Counties of Botetourt and Roanoke, hosted a second take back event on April 30, 2011 at four community locations. A media sub-committee was formed to develop flyers, press releases and media messages for the event including locally produced public service announcements (PSAs) which ran for two weeks prior to the event (see attachment 3). Flyers were posted at local pharmacies, hospitals and retirement communities and were distributed through the League of Older Americans and Meals-on-Wheels volunteers. Members of the media sub-committee took the message to the public through interviews on the local WDBJ7 television station, several talk radio programs (*Around Town* and *Mommy and Me*) and presentations to a number of civic organizations and retirement communities. The City of Roanoke donated use of their billboard space prior to the event and the Roanoke Civic Center donated

promotional space on their building marquee. Roanoke County featured the Take Back event on their *Roanoke County Today* program on local RVT3 (see attachment 4). The Task Force also worked with the youth led RAYSAC R.E.A.L. Team (RAYSAC Empowered Activist Leaders) to develop a campaign to promote the take back event to teens. The campaign involved a Facebook challenge among Roanoke Valley high school students for the two weeks leading up to the take back event. The school with the most activity on Facebook received a monetary prize. A total of 241 people showed their support for the Facebook Challenge by clicking “Like.”

The second take back event was a great success with 860 pounds of unwanted or expired prescription drugs collected in the Roanoke Valley during the four hour event – again the highest amount of any location in the state. Tim Carden, the Drug Enforcement Administration Resident Agent in Charge shared that the event’s success was a direct result of our efforts as a coalition and highlighted the excellent job the Task Force did to mobilize our community regarding the importance of proper prescription drug disposal along with bringing awareness about the health risks involved with prescription drug misuse.

**Take back events have continued to be held each April and October with each event bringing in a larger quantity of medications than the previous event.** Seven take back locations across five jurisdictions are now staffed by area law enforcement officers and community volunteers, and the Roanoke area continues to be a leader in the amount of medications collected across the state. The efforts of the Task Force’s media committee to get the word out about the take back events are working. More than 1400 pounds of medication were turned in at the April 2012 event alone, and more than 3,600 pounds of unwanted or expired prescription drugs have been turned in for safe disposal since the take back events started (see attachment 5). The media coverage generated from each event gives the Task Force the opportunity to increase awareness of the issue across all sectors of the

community. New data also suggests that residents are recognizing the potential dangers of prescription medications left unsecured in the home as well as the importance of proper medication disposal. In the 2010 phone survey, 59% of respondents stated that prescription drugs in their homes were locked up or put away. In September 2011, the follow-up survey showed that number had increased to 65%.

Knowledge about proper disposal of medications also seems to have improved. While the number of total respondents disposing of their medications by flushing dropped from 48% in 2010 to 43% in 2011, the number using “other” means jumped from 10% to 24% over the same period of time. When asked in 2011 about how they dispose of unused or expired medications, 62% of all the entire population surveyed thought that flushing meds could leave traces of pharmaceuticals in the drinking water as compared to 54% from the 2010 survey. Although the survey did not specifically ask about the take back events, 33% of all respondents said they were aware of safe prescription drug disposal options in the Roanoke Valley as compared to 12% the year prior. While awareness increased across all age groups, among 18-24 year olds, the numbers were even more encouraging with 53% percent of respondents being aware of safe disposal options compared to a response rate of zero in 2010.

Prescription drug misuse and improper disposal significantly impacts the health and environment of our entire regional community. From the beginning, the Task Force has strived to increase awareness about these issues. By working together as an intergovernmental collaboration with private organizations and representatives from the state and federal government, the Task Force has improved the community’s knowledge about the health and environmental risks associated with the improper disposal and misuse of prescription drugs. Our combined efforts are protecting the quality of life and the water in our beautiful valley.

## **Appendix**

Final Promotional Flyer

News Release

Photographs of Prescription Drug Task Force and Partners

Local Media Coverage (WDBJ 7, local CBS affiliate)

Survey Data

Statistics 2010-2012