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Media Center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAVING OUR KIDS AND RIVERS FROM DRUGS

Operation Medicine Cabinet Hopes To Build On Previous Success in the High Country May 22

(Watauga and Avery Counties, NC) - Do you have outdated or unused prescription drugs, over the counter medications, syringes or other medical supplies? Come drop them off at the sponsored take-back centers on Saturday May 22, 2010 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. It is an amnesty day, so no questions will be asked.

Take-back locations will be available at the Foscoe Fire Department, Beech Mountain Town Hall and the three Food Lion stores in Watauga County: the Highway 321 store in Boone, the Highway 421 Deep Gap store, and the Blowing Rock store. In Avery County, medications can be dropped off at Banner Elk Elementary, Newland Elementary or Riverside Elementary. The event will be held in conjunction with Watauga County's annual Hazardous Household Waste day.

On Oct. 3, 2009, a broad coalition of community partners came together to create the first ever prescription drug take-back day in the High Country. The event was a huge success, safely disposing of 40,000 pills and 12 gallons of liquid medication in Watauga County alone. This spring the community partners hope to expand on this success, and collect 100,000 pills.

The disposal of prescription drugs has long been a dilemma, and many medicine cabinets contain unused or outdated medications. Among teenagers, the fastest growing illegal drug use is the abuse of prescription drugs. The most common method of obtaining prescription drugs is by raiding the medicine cabinet of a friend or family, then consuming the pills or selling them.

"From a law enforcement perspective, one of our most important jobs is to work diligently and proactively to prevent drug abuse," said Watauga County Sherriff Len D. Hagaman. "By hosting an amnesty day that allows the public to turn in any kind of unused or unwanted medications, hopefully, we will keep those drugs off the street and out of the hands of children."

Another problem with outdated or unused prescription drugs is that people dispose of them improperly by flushing them down the toilet. If their home is connected to a local waste water treatment facility, then the drugs wind up in either the Watauga River or New River.

"A recent investigation by the Associated Press found a whole host of pharmaceuticals-including antibiotics, pain medication, anti-depressants, sex hormones, heart and blood pressure medicine-in the drinking water supplies of more than 40 million Americans," said Donna Lisenby, Watauga Riverkeeper.

ASU biology and chemistry students and faculty have conducted environmental tests to determine the effects of pharmaceutical estrogens (birth control and estrogen supplements) from the Boone Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) on male fish populations in the South Fork of the New River.

The results indicated that 60 to 66 percent of two species of male fish below the WWTP effluent are being feminized; tests with rainbow trout have yet to be conducted.

"Although preliminary tests have shown that pharmaceutical estrogens in the river just below the WWTP are right at levels known to cause feminization, it is unlikely that these levels persist very far downstream," said Dr. Shea Tuberty, of ASU's biology department.

"Any attempt to reduce the quantity of pharmaceuticals in water is a significant step towards environmental conservation."

Community members reached out to law enforcement officials from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Sheriff's Department as well as the Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils Police Departments. The river conservationists and law enforcement community united to fight the problem of prescription drug misuse.

"It is not often that law enforcement personnel and environmental groups get to work together on projects," said Avery County Sheriff Kevin Frye. "We are glad to be a part of such a positive and proactive program where we can help keep these drugs from being abused, and keep them from harming the rivers that bring so many people to the High Country."

"It has been an amazing testament to the collaborative spirit of our community to see how enthusiastically people have united to help host Operation Medicine Cabinet," said Wendy Patoprsty, Watauga County Extension Agent. "We have over 30 community partners, including, **Helen M. Clabough Charitable Foundation**, MountainKeepers, Watauga River Conservation Partners, Towns, and police departments of Banner Elk, Beech Mountain, Boone, Blowing Rock Newland and Seven Devils, the Avery and Watauga County Sheriff's Office, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Avery County Schools, Safe Kids North Carolina, Boone Drug, Watauga County Recycling/Solid Waste Department, Watauga Riverkeeper, Appalachian Voices, Food Lion, CVS, the Avery A & H fair, the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, Trophy Water Guide Service, Rotary Club of Blowing Rock, The National Committee for the New River, MPrints, NC Cooperative Extension Service, Precision Printing, the Smoky Mountain Center and Appalachian State University just to name a few," she continued.

"On behalf of all our partners, we are pleased to offer this new opportunity to our citizens to safely dispose of unused or unwanted medications properly, and we hope you will come see us on Saturday, May 22, and be a part of the community effort to save the rivers and kids from drugs," said Watauga County Recycling Coordinator Lisa Doty.

To find out more about the event click to DrugTakeBackDay.com.