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Finding future plans in an open Medicine Cabinet

By Melanie Marshall

Operation Medicine Cabinet was such a success the federal Drug Enforcement Agency has discussed a proposed protocol for future operations for other agencies with Watauga sheriff Len Hagaman.

There is currently no standard for events to collect unused or expired medications. The events must be coordinated through local, state and federal agencies due to the handling of controlled substances.

Saturday's event was the first one of its kind to be held in Watauga County. Take-back sites were established at each of the Food Lion locations in the county and the Seven Devils town hall. Officers and a representative of Boone Drug were at each location to handle the medication turned in with no questions asked of participants.

The purpose of the event was to keep medications out of the water supply, as people were told to flush drug down the toilet in the past, and keep controlled substances off the streets.

The operation netted one and a half 55-gallon drums full of various medications. Pain medications, blood thinners, anti-allergens, iodine, insulin, antibiotics, steroids, hormones, anti-depressants, cough syrup, topical creams, over the counter medications, flu vaccinations, heart, blood pressure, cancer and heartburn medicine, and even some pet medications were brought to the different sites.

The totals of each type of medication are approximately 40,000 pills, 12 gallons of liquid medication, and 2000 sharps, meaning syringes and lancets. One glucose meter



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was also turned in.


"It was obvious that the public is concerned about the environment and getting dangerous narcotics off of the street. I would estimate that clearly 35 percent to 38 percent of the meds received were controlled substances," said sheriff Hagaman. "As an example, I saw almost a whole pint container filled with nothing but hydrocodone and oxycontin."

He added that the street value of the narcotics collected would translate into thousands of dollars.


"I feel it was a great success and it will probably be an annual event now that we see the outcome of what was produced today," said Boone officer Toby Ragan.

The operation was a coordinated effort of law enforcement and community organizations including MountainKeepers, Watauga River Conservation Partners, Boone Drug, Watauga County Recycling/Solid Waste Department, Watauga Riverkeeper/Appalachian Voices, Food Lion, The National Committee for the New River, MPrints, NC Cooperative Extension Service, Precision Printing, the Smoky Mountain Center, Towns of Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils, the Watauga County Sheriff's Office, Boone Police, the State Bureau of Investigation, Blowing Rock Police, Seven Devils Police, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Appalachian State University.

The agencies and organizations involved are planning a follow-up meeting to discuss the aspects of the event that went smoothly and those that would need some tuning before the next operation. They will also discuss the protocol preparation to be provided to the DEA.

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