

OUR TOWNS

ISLANDWIDE

Stores taking unused meds

BY TED PHILLIPS

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Long Islanders can now dispose of unused medications at pharmacies in King Kullen stores as the grocery chain becomes the first to offer the service locally, environmentalists and company officials announced yesterday.

Dropping unwanted and unused prescription and over-the-counter drugs at the grocery store is “the easiest, most convenient and safest method for safe disposal,” Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said at a news conference in Massapequa yesterday. The Farmingdale-based organization led a coalition that includes Bethpage-based King Kullen, the New Jersey-based drinking water and wastewater utility United Water and the Suffolk County Water Authority to address unused drugs

being flushed down the toilet.

“Once those unwanted drugs are flushed, they are going into Long Island’s drinking water and coastal supplies,” Esposito said.

The organizers cited studies by the U.S. Geological Survey that have found traces of medications in Long Island’s waterways.

King Kullen pharmacists at three locations in Nassau County and eight in Suffolk will collect medications in tamper-resistant boxes. People can drop off any prescription medication with no questions asked, officials said. Once full, the boxes will be shipped to Texas to be incinerated.

“Clean water is of great importance; it’s something we all have to get involved in and protect,” said Albert Hesse Jr., King Kullen director of pharmacy. “It also solves the problem of it’s not in your medicine cabinet for someone to misuse.”

The collection boxes will remain behind the counter and only pharmacists will have access to them.

Citizens Campaign for the Environment and the Suffolk County Water Authority will lead education campaigns, while King Kullen and United Water will pay for the effort. The costs will depend on how much is collected, officials said.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency last month issued new rules that allow pharmacies to collect the drugs. Those rules were implemented as part of the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act passed by Congress in 2010. In the case of controlled substances, such as the opiate hydrocodone, the only legal way for patients to dispose of such medications before the new rules was to give them to law enforcement agencies, which led to people flushing the drugs down the toilet, the DEA notes on its website.