

LIers hand in old, unused meds at drug take-back event in Copiague

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looking for drugs.

Suffolk County police officers collect prescription drugs as FREE Safe Disposal of Prescription Drugs DEA holds an event at the Town of Babylon Senior Center at Tanner Park in Copiague as part of the 10th annual National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2015. (Credit: Steve Pfost)

Leona McQueen used to throw prescription medications in the trash when they expired or were no longer needed. It did not occur to her that someone might sift through her garbage

On Saturday, McQueen, 72, of Copiague traveled to the Tanner Park Senior Center in Copiague to surrender unused medications to Suffolk County police, who were collecting the drugs as part of the 10th annual National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day. "This keeps them off the streets," McQueen said.

New York State Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman used the Copiague event to urge others to stop tossing prescription drugs in the garbage and to keep them out of reach of children.

"The number one source of drugs for children are drugs they get out of the medicine cabinet of parents' or friends' homes," Schneiderman said.

Until about a decade ago, authorities told people to flush unused drugs down the toilet, said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Farmingdale-based Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

"Now we know with the new science that's the wrong thing to do," said Esposito, citing a 2006 federal study that found 40 percent of Suffolk County groundwater samples that were collected had small levels of pharmaceuticals.

But the old message sticks in many minds, she said.

For years, Loretta Kells, 80, of Lindenhurst, had thrown drugs in the toilet. "I didn't realize it could get into the water," she said. On Saturday, she gave Suffolk police a plastic bag full of medications that her daughter had been prescribed after back surgery, including the painkiller morphine, which the federal government says has a "high potential for abuse."

"I don't want to see these things in the wrong hands," Kells said.

By the end of the three-hour Tanner Park event, police had collected more than three 30-gallon trash bags of drugs, which would later be incinerated, Officer Joe Maldonado said.

For a map of year-round pharmaceutical drop-off locations on Long Island, go to citizenscampaign.org, click "Public health, toxics, and recycling" and then click "Pharmaceutical disposal."

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