

TO YOUR HEALTH

OPERATION MEDICINE CABINET

Unused prescription drugs a powerful lure for addicts, users

By **RUSTY GRAHAM**

rgraham@hcnonline.com

More than 49 pounds of expired and unused prescription and over-the-counter medication was collected Saturday for disposal by law enforcement specialists.

Deputies from constable precincts 1 and 5 joined forces with The Coalition of Behavioral Health Services and the Partnership for a Drug-Free Spring Branch to man a dropoff point at H-E-B Bunker Hill Market.

Officers watched as residents deposited unused pills and powders into secured cardboard boxes that will be burned in a medical incinerator.

Sandy Olson, executive director of both the Coalition and the Partnership, was happy with the amount of drugs brought by, but also pleased with the awareness provided by the highly visible event.

"We've had people say they

were glad to know that something like this was available," said Olson. "They were wondering what to do with old medications."

The use and abuse of prescription medications is on the rise in the area, said Sheila Hunt, director of community education at IntraCare Behavioral Health and a Coalition board member.

Nearly one if five teenagers can get prescription drugs (unprescribed) within an hour; one in three can get them within a day, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

"Offering safe and effective ways to dispose of expired and unused medication is one way to keep these drugs out of the hands of youth and others who seek to abuse them," Hunt said.

She said flushing prescription drugs down the toilet can poison the water supply, and putting

them in the garbage can lead to addicts going through that garbage and poisoning of pets and animals.

Olson said the Coalition hopes to do a pill takeback every quarter, and also hopes to do the events in other parts of town.

She said Saturday's event was modeled on similar events in Florida — in fact, she purchased use of the brand name "Operation Medicine Cabinet" from a Florida group.

The "operation" points out that the medicine cabinet in a home is not the safest place to store unused and expired medications, but may well be the place teenagers and others who seek the drugs for recreational use find them.

If you need to keep prescription drugs until the next take-back or collection program, take the drugs out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance such as cat litter or used coffee grounds



Photo by RUSTY GRAHAM/The Examiner

A resident disposes of unused medications Saturday at the Operation Medicine Cabinet takeback event at H-E-B Bunker Hill Market. More than 49 pounds of medication were collected and will be incinerated.

in disposable container with a lid, like a margarine tub, and store in a safe place.

For more information on prescription drugs — and their proper disposal — go to http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/prescrptn_drugs/index.html.