



Tales from a Sisters Naturalist by Jim Anderson

Watching over us and our homes

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is a state agency designed to help keep our planet Earth — and us — healthy. Currently, DEQ is encouraging Oregonians throughout the state to take part in a nationwide effort on Saturday, April 29 to collect unused, unwanted or expired medications so they can be disposed of properly.

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), in association with hundreds of law enforcement, public health and other organizations, is conducting the upcoming National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day.

Last year, Americans turned in 366 tons (over 730,000 pounds) of prescription drugs at almost 5,200 sites operated by DEA and more than 4,000 of its state and local law enforcement partners. Overall, in its 12 previous Take-Back events, DEA and its partners have taken in over 7.1 million pounds — more than 3,500 tons — of pills.

More than two dozen collection events will take place in Oregon from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For details on event locations and times, visit the DEA website at www.dea.diversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback. You can select events by city, county, and zip code.

The collection events help people dispose of drugs in a way that's safe for both people and the environment. Because as many drugs pass through wastewater treatment filtering systems; flushing unwanted drugs down the toilet or drain ends up polluting waterways,

For people unable to take part in the events, more than 80 law enforcement offices in Oregon accept unwanted and unused drugs throughout the year. For a list of these sites, see www.oregon.gov/pharmacy/Imports/OR_UnwantedDrugDropOff_Sites.pdf, or contact your local city police office or county sheriff's office for more information.

On the other side of the coin there are some companies not interested in the

health of our air, water, and soil; as a result, it's financially unhealthy of them to not stay within the guidelines of DEQ.

As an example, Contact Industries in Prineville was issued a \$6,600 penalty by DEQ for allegedly performing unlicensed asbestos abatement work at its facility.

DEQ stated the company employees removed approximately 185 square feet of sheet vinyl flooring from the site in November 2016, but later testing showed the flooring material contained asbestos. According to DEQ, Contact Industries notified DEQ of the asbestos disturbance and a licensed asbestos abatement contractor arrived to assess and decontaminate the affected area.

However, the company violated state law by conducting an asbestos abatement project without being a licensed asbestos abatement contractor and without notifying DEQ. The company is said to have also mishandled asbestos-containing material and failed to properly manage and secure that material.

In the event you don't know, or have forgotten why asbestos is such a villain in the area of human health, here's a reminder:

Asbestos is the name given to several naturally occurring fibrous minerals that are very strong, durable and heat-resistant. Because of these properties, asbestos has been used in the manufacture of a wide range of construction materials, such as roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, insulation, adhesives, and cement siding, along with safety textiles; and friction products such as automobile clutch, brake and transmission parts.

All of which we can stumble over without warning.

Exposure to asbestos increases our risk of developing lung disease; the fibers become embedded and accumulate in lung tissue over time, and to make that even more deadly, there is no known safe level for human exposure to asbestos. Therefore, contact with any amount of asbestos should be avoided.

Symptoms to asbestos-related problems may take several years to develop following exposure. The most common asbestos-related lung diseases are: asbestosis, a serious, progressive, long-term non-cancer disease of the lungs, caused by inhaling asbestos fibers that irritate lung tissues and cause the tissues to scar, which makes it difficult for oxygen to get into the blood.

Then there's chemicals getting into our environment. DEQ issued a \$6,421 civil penalty to Solaicx, Inc., a company the manufactures and sells solar arrays, for failing to comply with the monitoring requirements of their permit for their facility. According to DEQ scientists, the facility failed to collect monitoring data for iron discharge in the 2015-2016 monitoring period.

They are required to sample and monitor storm water to ensure discharges meet the benchmarks set forth in their permit. (To make everything work as planned, the system that protects water quality in Oregon is highly dependent upon permit-holders complying with



PHOTO PROVIDED

DEQ scientist taking water samples.

the monitoring requirements of the permits.)

Without consistent and accurate data, DEQ and the public can't determine whether permit-holders are complying with pollutant limits. To make it even worse, having a limit to how much pollutants can be legally discharged into our environment is already a serious risk, no matter how

you look at it.

That, from a scientific viewpoint of unwanted medications, drugs, and required environmental monitoring is why it is so vital to public safety that there is an agency set up to collect and destroy chemicals and medications for public health. Our tax money going to a place that protect us from ourselves...

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