

Funeral Directors: Help Your Clients Avoid Prescription Drug-Related Victimization



Funeral directors have a unique opportunity to provide important information to their clients about the proper disposal of the recently deceased's prescription drugs.



Shortly before people die, they often take powerful pain relievers and other abusable drugs that can be dangerous. This information can prevent accidental poisonings and potentially dangerous self-medication by anyone who finds these drugs. Also, thieves may read obituaries in the newspaper or online in order to target the home of the deceased to steal leftover medications. Proper disposal prevents medications from falling into the wrong hands and keeps your communities safe from harmful toxins.

■ **What Can Funeral Directors Do?**

- Add medication disposal to the checklist for pre- or post-funeral planning materials. This can include the following:
 - » A list of local medication drop-off locations, if available.
 - » Guidelines from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's website.ⁱ
 - » Information in the "How to Handle Leftover Medication" factsheet developed by the Preventing Prescription Abuse in the Workplace Technical Assistance Center.



■ **Why Is It Important for Funeral Directors to Provide This Information?**

- Recently deceased individuals may have unused prescription medications left in their homes. Unused or old medications pose the potential risk of:
 - » **Poisoning.** Children or pets may ingest medicine and become sick or die.
 - » **Medication theft.** Prescription pain relievers, in particular, can be illegally sold or given away.
 - » **Unsafe nonmedical use by family members.** Over 70 percent of people who abuse prescription pain relievers get them from friends or relatives.ⁱⁱ Drug overdose deaths in the United States are a leading cause of accidental death and rose for the 11th straight year in 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Improperly disposing of medications directly in the trash can leave them accessible for nonmedical use. Improperly flushing some medications down the toilet can pollute water systems.

■ **Sources**

- <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm>
- The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy. Epidemic: Responding to America's Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis. 2011.
- Jones CM, Mack KA, Paulozzi LJ. Pharmaceutical Overdose Deaths, United States, 2010. Journal of the American Medical Association, 2013;309(7):657-659. doi:10.1001/jama.2013.272.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration supports the Preventing Prescription Abuse in the Workplace Technical Assistance Center. For more information, contact PAWTArequest@PIRE.org.

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