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Flemington Borough Installs First Permanent Prescription Drug Drop Box in Hunterdon County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Flemington NJ - October 31, 2011) – For the past two years, the **Safe Communities Coalition – Hunterdon/Somerset** (Coalition) has participated in the DEA's **National Take-Back Days** as well as the **American Medicine Chest Challenge**. One way to reduce the accessibility of prescription drugs is to properly dispose of them in a safe and environmentally friendly manner. These take-back days provide locations throughout the county where individuals can dispose of expired, unused and unwanted medications, no questions asked.

The Safe Communities Coalition has taken the initiative in collaboration with the Hunterdon County Sheriff's and Prosecutor's Office to provide our community members a permanent drop off location. With the help of **Sheriff Fred Brown** and **Undersheriff Robert Smith** (who is a founding Coalition member), the drop-off box will be housed in the **Hunterdon County Justice Center** (located at 65 Park Avenue Flemington, NJ 08822) for citizens to safely dispose of their prescription drugs. The drop box will be located in the lobby of the County Justice Center (New Court House) and accessible during working hours. The Sheriff's Office volunteered to house and protect the integrity of the box by having it in this secure, safe location.



In addition, a permanent drop-off location could not have happened without the assistance of the **Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office**. The Prosecutor's Office will be responsible for the legal disposal of the prescription drugs collected.

"Having a permanent Rx take-back box is one more strategy Hunterdon County has in our war against drugs," said **Christina Steffner**, Chair of the Coalition. "It reminds parents and guardians of the importance of discarding prescription drugs to reduce the opportunity of abuse."

Members of the Coalition were on hand on Monday, October 24, 2011 at 11:00 a.m. to officially place the drop box at the Courthouse. Also on hand for the inauguration of the drop-off box were **Prosecutor Anthony Kearns**, **Hunterdon County Sheriff Fred Brown** and **Chief of Detectives John Kuczynski**. The cost of this box has been offset by the Safe Communities Coalition.

A photo of the Coalition members who attended this event is attached. ***Caption: From left to right: Prosecutor Anthony Kearns, Sheriff Fred Brown, Mary Vecchio, Karen Palotas, Rebecca Abbate, Linda King, Peggy Down, Barbara Giordano, Cathy Canterino, Undersheriff Robert Smith and Lesley Gabel.***

Prescription drug abuse in the United States is increasing at an alarming rate, especially for teenagers who report they can easily obtain prescription pills from medicine cabinets in their own and other people's homes. Data from the New Jersey High School Risk & Protective Factor Survey administered in 2008 indicate that students were able to obtain the following prescription drugs without a prescription: amphetamines, sedatives, hallucinogens, ecstasy, and oxycontin. Additionally, the rate of county high school students reporting use of Rx/OTC drugs in the past year (5.7%) exceeded that for the state (4.2%).

Lesley Gabel, Coalition Project Director, is hopeful that other police departments throughout Hunterdon County will soon follow the lead set by the Safe Communities Coalition, Hunterdon County Sheriff's and Prosecutor's Office. "This will certainly help decrease the availability and accessibility of these drugs," said Gabel. "70% of those that abuse prescription drugs obtain them from home medicine cabinets. The community will finally have a way to regularly help the battle against substance abuse by disposing these unused/expired prescription drugs. We recommend that you black out your personal information on the prescription bottles. No questions will be asked when dropping them off into the disposal box."

On October 29th the national **DEA Prescription Drug Take Back Day** will occur between 10 AM to 2 PM throughout the United States. Local sites in Hunterdon County are listed on the Coalition's web site at www.hcsafecommunities.com and at www.dea.gov.

The **American Medicine Chest Challenge** will occur on November 12th. More information can be found on the Coalition's web site and at www.americanmedicalchest.com.

The goal of the Safe Communities Coalition is to lower teen alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and prescription drug abuse in Hunterdon County through environmental change. For confidential help or for services or programs, contact us at 908-782-3909. For more information about the Coalition, visit us online at www.hcsafecommunities.com.

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