

DRUG COLLECTION

Big Red Barrels-Drug collection program launched in Lenawee

By Dennis Pelham Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Big Red Barrel drop boxes went to work Wednesday in Lenawee County after a panel of experts talked about a growing problem with prescription drug abuse. “There’s not a community that hasn’t been affected by the misuse of prescription drugs,” Drug Enforcement Agency spokesman Rich Isaacson told an audience at the Lenawee County Human Services Building. Prescription drugs have been the fastest-growing drug problem over the past seven years, Isaacson said. The drop boxes now available in Lenawee County for people to anonymously dispose of unwanted medications and drugs is an effective way to keep them out of the wrong hands, he said. The bright red drop boxes are at the Lenawee County Sheriff’s Department and the offices of the Adrian, Hudson and Tecumseh police departments. They are available to the public during regular business hours.

The program, modeled on one in Livingston County, was organized by the Lenawee Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition. The group hosted Wednesday’s panel discussion to help educate the public about the drug problem and promote the drop-off program. Six of the 10 most-abused drugs today are prescription medications, Isaacson said. In a survey taken last year, 10 percent of Lenawee County’s teens reported misusing prescription drugs for recreation, said ProMedica pharmacist Jean Osborn. The medical profession has increased the use of drugs for patients with chronic pain in recent years, Osborn said. They too often end up in the hands of young people who find them in the homes of grandparents or other relatives, she said.

On Saturday, 76 pounds of unwanted tablets and capsules were dropped off by people during a drug take-back event at ProMedica Bixby Hospital, Osborn said. There were 56 pounds collected during a similar event a year ago. Availability of the drugs is showing up in the number of people seeking treatment for addictions, said Gary McCullough of the substance abuse counseling firm McCullough, Vargas and Associates.



A Big Red Barrel drop box sits in front of a panel of experts as they discuss the growing problem of prescription drug abuse during an event Wednesday at the Lenawee County Human Services Building. TELEGRAM PHOTO BY LAD STRAYER

“Especially in our county in the last four or five years, we’re seeing more people abusing prescription drugs,” McCullough said. People of all ages are seeking treatment. “Many have started off using it legally,” he said. Some people are unable to quit using the addictive drugs, he said. One counseling patient started using Vicodin to treat pain from a car crash injury, he said. When he could no longer get prescriptions he started buying pills on the street. “When people get addicted they will do just about anything to get their drugs,” he said. It is not unusual for people to come back several times to repeat treatment programs, McCullough said. There is also an effect on the environment from drugs that eventually end up going through wastewater treatment systems, said Martha Hall, director of environmental health at the Lenawee County Health Department. “Trace amounts are showing up in lakes, streams, rivers and groundwater,” Hall said. “If we can prevent it from being there we want

to do that. The Big Red Barrel is a wonderful program," she said.

Sheriff Jack Welsh said one-day collection programs that started in the county several years ago had collected 346 pounds of drugs before Saturday's event. A proposal for a permanent program was taken to the county's police chiefs association, he said. After chiefs pledged their support, he said, the next step was to find money to buy the barrels.

The Adrian Noon Kiwanis Club, Hudson Pharmacy, the Terry Collins family and Tecumseh Coalition for Youth each donated \$500 to buy a barrel. Lenawee County Prosecutor Burke Castleberry reported his office collected \$541 to go toward disposal of the drugs to be collected. Another \$100 was donated by a state prosecutor's association. Joe Carney of the Livingston County Community Alliance said the program has been spreading through Michigan since his organization came up with the idea to give people a means of easily getting rid of drugs.

The first two barrels were set up at the sheriff's department and Michigan State Police post in Livingston County, said Carney. "Then the telephones started ringing. 'Where's mine?'" he said. Police departments throughout the county now have drop-off containers, he said, and he is traveling to other counties to help set up similar programs. "It's growing and getting better and can only get better in the future," Carney said.