

Vote on LA County drug take-back proposal delayed again

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A Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors vote on a proposal that would require drug companies to design and pay for a program to collect and dispose of unused drugs, needles, lancets and other sharps is facing its fourth postponement since its introduction last year.

Supervisor Michael Antonovich, sponsor of the [pharmaceutical take-back measure](#), is asking the board to delay Tuesday's scheduled vote until June 14 to provide more time for all sides to reach an agreement. The pharmaceutical industry continues to oppose the proposal.

In the meantime, Antonovich is calling for the development of "immediate options" that would give county residents an opportunity to start returning drugs and sharps right away, according to the motion he added to the supplemental agenda for Tuesday's meeting. This interim step is necessary, the motion says, because the proposed ordinance - as currently written - would provide drug makers at least 13 months from the date of adoption to develop a take-back plan and put it into action.

Antonovich calls on county counsel and the Los Angeles County Health Agency to work with the California Retailers Association, pharmaceutical manufacturers and sharps manufacturers on "expedited implementation of more immediate options."

The motion notes that several pharmacies have expressed interest in an interim plan that could include the pharmacies hosting take-back bins, providing mail-in envelopes and educating customers on proper disposal of drugs and sharps to keep them out of landfills and groundwater.

Prescription drug makers, meantime, say the main take-back proposal is unnecessary. They argue that the problem can be dealt with by teaching people how to safely dispose of drugs and needles in their trash.

Heidi Sanborn, executive director of the National Stewardship Action Council, an environmental group, expressed frustration at the multiple delays in passing an ordinance in L.A. County.

Seven California counties have passed a form of a take-back law, she said, noting that each one "tried to find a collaborative solution" with the drug makers, "and all failed."

"Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior," argued Sanborn, saying the supervisors should "just pass [the ordinance] and be on the right side of history."

Alameda and Santa Cruz Counties have laws similar to what L.A. County is considering, said Sanborn. San Francisco, Marin, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties have ordinances requiring pharmaceutical makers to pay for the collection and disposal of drugs only, she said, adding that a San Luis Obispo law requires retailers to take back unused prescriptions, but the retailers bear the cost, not drug manufacturers.

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