



news release

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COUNTY SPONSORS POLICE TRAINING TO COMBAT RISE IN PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

The growing abuse of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications by teens and other young people will be the focus today of a special day-long training session for DARE and youth officers at the Westchester County Police Academy in Valhalla.

The training will give police officers the tools they need to combat an alarming rise among youth of prescription drug abuse. More than 40 police officers from departments around Westchester are expected to attend.

“The training today addresses a growing issue for communities around the country – the abuse of prescription drugs and even over-the-counter medicines like cough syrup and cold medicines,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “We must provide our police officers with the information and training they need to help deter young people from this and all kinds of drug abuse.”

Commissioner Thomas Belfiore of the Department of Public Safety said national studies show that drug abuse by young people has been declining since 2001 with one exception – the non-medical use of prescription drugs and other medications.

“The federal government recently reported a 24% decline in the use of illegal narcotics of all kinds since 2001, which is terrific news. The one disturbing trend that has emerged is the rising abuse of medications by our youth,” he said.

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The National Drug Control Strategy for 2008, released recently by the White House, concluded:

- More 12- and 13-year-olds experimented with prescription drugs in 2006 than with marijuana;
- The improper use of prescription medications rose 17% among 18- to 25-year-olds;
- Admissions to treatment programs for addiction to prescription drugs have risen sharply since the 1990s, ranking third among youth behind only marijuana and alcohol, and
- Emergency room admissions for overdoses of prescription drugs among young people are on the rise.

Belfiore said some young people mistakenly believe that it is safer to abuse prescription drugs than illicit street drugs. He also said young people often have easy access to prescription drugs, pilfering or otherwise obtaining them from friends and family members who have been prescribed them legitimately.

In the effort to make sure unused prescription medications are properly disposed of, Westchester County has begun collecting them at the county-sponsored Household Recycling Days. By collecting and destroying unused medications, the county is both protecting the environment and preventing such medications from falling into the wrong hands.

Today's training is being sponsored by Westchester County, The Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth, the Westchester County Youth Officers Association and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

Funding for the training comes from a Drug Free Communities Grant that the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth obtained last year. The Coalition was formed by Spano in 2003 to bring community coalitions together to address drug abuse and underage drinking. Spano and District Attorney Janet DiFiore chair the Coalition's efforts at providing training for law enforcement officers, doctors, nurses, educators and prevention specialists.