

## News Releases

# DHEC News Release: DHEC, SLED Announce New Effort to Combat "Pill Mills" and Prescription Drug Abuse

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 8, 2013

## DHEC, SLED Announce New Effort to Combat "Pill Mills" and Prescription Drug Abuse

COLUMBIA - South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Director Catherine Templeton and State Law Enforcement Division Chief Mark Keel held a news conference today to announce details of a collaborative new effort to combat prescription drug abuse and "pill mills."

Templeton and Keel were joined by Senator Gerald Malloy (Darlington), Representative Mike Pitts (Laurens), Fifth Circuit Solicitor Dan Johnson, and Union County Sheriff David Taylor. DHEC has long gathered information on all the controlled substance prescriptions filled in the state and made the information available upon request to doctors, pharmacists, and law enforcement. However, the information was too broad, and therefore not fully utilized.

Today, DHEC announced three new elements to assist law enforcement in combatting the problem:

1. DHEC will proactively assist the efforts of law enforcement across the state by providing targeted lists of individuals engaged in suspicious activity.
2. A new DHEC drug control officer will be assigned exclusively to help SLED and the county sheriffs make cases statewide.
3. Beginning January 1, 2014, and pursuant to statute, DHEC will require pharmacies to report their prescription drug distribution at the end of each business day. (Currently, that reporting is done monthly.) This will result in law enforcement having valuable information in real time.

"The goal of this effort is to identify alleged offenders based on the information routinely collected by DHEC, and provide that information directly to law enforcement," said Director Templeton. "This new, collaborative effort will help law enforcement shine a broader and brighter light on suspicious activity and help them build cases against criminals."

"The abuse of prescription drugs affects every community in our state," said Chief Keel. "That's why it's important that physicians, pharmacists, law enforcement and the public must work together on this issue. By sharing information and working together, DHEC, SLED and our citizens must be educated, informed about the dangers of prescription drug abuse, and not turn a blind eye to what's happening in our communities."

In the United States, prescription drug abuse is second only to the abuse of marijuana. In two different studies, S.C. has ranked 10th (2008) and 23rd (2010) highest in the U.S. in opioid painkiller prescriptions per capita. In 2010, S.C. ranked 23rd highest per capita in overdose deaths, with the most recent data (2011) noting 225 prescription overdose deaths in the state. (Sources: U.S. DEA, CDC, S.C. DHEC)

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