

Dept. Military Affairs: Guard members assist in Wisconsin becoming tops in nation in Drug Take Back Day collection effort

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WAUKESHA, Wis. – Citizen Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin National Guard helped Wisconsin become number one in the 19th annual Drug Take Back initiative that takes place each year nationwide.

Members of the Wisconsin National Guard's Counterdrug Program assisted at drug collection sites across Wisconsin and then helped consolidate unused or expired prescription drugs at a consolidation facility in Waukesha Oct. 26.

Nationwide, a record 985,392 pounds of unused medications were turned in at Drug Take Back events this year. Wisconsin led the way with 89,982 pounds collected – representing more than 9 percent of the nation's total.

Some 270 people from law enforcement agencies and the Wisconsin National Guard participated in this year's Drug Take Back Day at 290 total collection sites across Wisconsin.

Sgt. 1st Class Claire Kopczynski, who drills with the Army National Guard's Milwaukee-based 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Headquarters and serves full-time with the Wisconsin National Guard's Counterdrug program, was one of the Soldiers on site in Waukesha helping to consolidate the drugs collected from across the state.

“Working in Counterdrug is really an honor,” she said. “I think it's one of the best

kept secrets in the Guard.”

As a civilian, Kopczynski works as an emergency dispatcher in Brown County. She is currently on military leave from her civilian duties while serving with the Counterdrug program.

“It’s an extremely unique program, and I enjoy taking my skills on the civilian side – working in 9-1-1 dispatch – to participate as a crime analyst supporting the agency that I support,” she said. “Specifically today though, I think it’s great to get some of those unused drugs off the street, especially if they’re narcotics. We don’t want those in the wrong hands. Obviously we have a substantial problem in our country with the misuse of prescription drugs, so it’s really great to participate in disposing of them properly.”

Many communities have pill drop boxes where people can drop off unused medications at any time, but that’s not the case everywhere, she said, so events like the Drug Take Back Day can make a big impact on a community.

“There are two things that scare me as a parent in 2020 – online bullying and drug use,” Kopczynski said. “And I can tell you as a 911 dispatcher, I have spoken to parents who are calling in either an overdose for a child or a child out of control and under the use and influence of drugs. To be able to have an impact and get those things off the streets is what I’m happy about.”

Master Sgt. Melissa Kulick, a Counterdrug Program analyst who is assigned to Milwaukee’s 128th Air Refueling Wing, agreed.

“I think it’s really good, because we know that we’re making an impact in the community,” Kulick said. “And that’s the thing with the Counterdrug Program. I think a lot of people are very proud to say that they’re a part of it, because the stuff I’m working on is making our community safer by being a part of this program. Our mission is to detect, deter, and dismantle drug trafficking organizations and money laundering organizations, and that affects people at a local acute level.”

Kulick works at the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area facility in Southeastern Wisconsin, and said the Guard works closely with other law enforcement agencies in an effort to stem the tide of illegal drugs in the state and region.

“I think we all have been touched by someone in our life who has been addicted to

drugs,” she said. “I know people who have been battling heroin for a long time, and so if you can be a part of that, and you can help eliminate some drugs and take them off the street or dangerous gangs...if you can take illegal weapons and illicit narcotics off the street, if you can help that in any way, I think it’s a great thing, and you’re impacting your community.”

When Kulick reports to drill, she is a member of the 128th Air Refueling Wing’s Force Support Squadron. She’s been part of the Guard’s Counterdrug Program for more than four years, and while her military career does not align with law enforcement or military intelligence, she’s found success in the program by demonstrating resourcefulness, customer service, and dedication.

“There’s a lot of people who do a lot of different jobs within the military, but again, the biggest thing is working together and building relationships and also working with our law enforcement partners,” she said. “We’re all putting our resources together and supporting each other, and it’s a beautiful thing.”

Agencies from the local, state, and federal level all participate in the annual Drug Take Back Day. Each year, it collects hundreds of tons of drugs that may have otherwise ended up on the streets, or in municipal water supplies after people unknowingly disposed of their old prescriptions improperly.

Nationwide more than 4,100 law enforcement and military personnel participated in Drug Take Back Day events this year.