

Press Release
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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Washington Posts DEA Pain Pills Database

Where did the pain pills go? For the first time, a database maintained by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) that tracks the path of every single pain pill sold in the United States — by manufacturers and distributors to pharmacies in every town and city — has been made public. The Post gained access to the DEA's Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System, known as ARCOS, as the result of a court order. The Post and HD Media, which publishes the Charleston Gazette-Mail in West Virginia, waged a year-long legal battle for access to the database. The version of the database published by The Post allows readers to learn how much hydrocodone and oxycodone went to individual states and counties, and which companies and distributors were responsible.

The Washington Post sifted through nearly 380 million transactions from 2006 through 2012 that are detailed in the DEA's database and analyzed shipments of oxycodone and hydrocodone pills, which account for three-quarters of the total opioid pill shipments to pharmacies. The Post is making this data available at the county and state levels in order to help the public understand the impact of years of prescription pill shipments on their communities.

These records provide a synopsis of the surge of legal pain pills that fueled the prescription opioid epidemic, which resulted in nearly 100,000 deaths during the seven-year time frame ending in 2012. A county-level analysis of the cumulative data shows where the most oxycodone and hydrocodone pills were distributed across the country over that time: more than 76 billion in all. From 2006 to 2012 there were 38,269,630 prescription pain pills, enough for 203 pills per person per year, supplied to Mingo County, W.Va.

The Post analysis shows that the volumes of the pills handled by the companies climbed as the epidemic surged, increasing 51 percent from 8.4 billion in 2006 to 12.6 billion in 2012. Yearly county-level maps show how the influx of pills spread.

Just six companies distributed 75 percent of the pills — oxycodone and hydrocodone — during this period: McKesson Corp., Walgreens, Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen, CVS and Walmart, according to an analysis of the database by The Washington Post.

Three companies manufactured about 88 percent of the opioids: SpecGx, a subsidiary of Mallinckrodt; Actavis Pharma; and Par Pharmaceutical, a subsidiary of Endo Pharmaceuticals.

Comparing county-level maps of opioid overdose deaths and pill shipments reveal a virtual opioid belt of more than 90 counties stretching southwest from Webster County, W.Va., through southern Virginia and ending in Monroe County, Ky. This includes 18 of the top 20 counties ranked by per-capita prescription opioid deaths nationwide and 12 of the top 20 counties for opioid pills distributed per capita.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) West Virginia suffers from the highest rate of drug overdose mortality in the United States, (57.8 per 100,000) involving both prescribed opioids, such as oxycontin, and illicit opioids, including heroin and fentanyl.

The Washington Post is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, D.C., with a particular emphasis on national politics and the federal government. To read the full article please visit <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/dea-pain-pill-database/>

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org