

Walgreens Agrees to Pay \$80 Million in Prescription Painkiller Settlement



Walgreens on Tuesday agreed to pay \$80 million in civil penalties, in order to resolve allegations by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) that the company violated federal rules regarding the distribution of prescription painkillers such as oxycodone.

The settlement was the largest in the DEA's history, Reuters reports. The DEA said Walgreens, the nation's largest drug store chain, allowed controlled substances such as oxycodone and other prescription painkillers to be diverted for abuse and illegal black market sales.

"National pharmaceutical chains are not exempt from following the law," Mark Trouville, special agent in charge in the DEA's Miami Field Division, said in a statement. "All DEA registrants will be held accountable when they violate the law and threaten public health and safety."

According to the DEA, Walgreens' Distribution Center in Jupiter, Florida was the largest supplier of oxycodone to retail pharmacies in the state. The DEA said the distribution center failed to comply with agency regulations that required it to report suspicious prescription drug orders that it received from its pharmacies.

Six retail pharmacies in Florida that received suspicious drug shipments from the Jupiter Distribution Center filled customer prescriptions that they knew, or should have known, were not for legitimate medical use, according to the DEA. As part of the settlement, the six pharmacies and the distribution center will be banned for two years from dispensing various controlled substances. Walgreens admitted it failed to uphold its obligations as a DEA registrant.

In a statement, the company said, "As part of the agreement with DEA and our continuing desire to work with DEA to combat prescription drug abuse, we have identified specific compliance measures – many of which Walgreens has already taken – to enhance our ordering processes and inventory systems, to provide our team members with the tools, training and support they need to ensure the appropriate dispensing of controlled substances and to improve collaboration across the industry."