

El Dorado, Placer counties part of opioid lawsuit

By Lake Tahoe News

El Dorado and Placer counties have joined a lawsuit against opioid manufacturers and distributors because of the opioid epidemic. Thirty California counties are part of the legal matter in federal court.

The lawsuit calls for drug companies to end practices that have led to the epidemic and seeks legal damages for the taxpayer money spent by the counties to respond to the crisis.

More than 500 public entities have filed similar suits.

The complaint alleges that many of the nation's largest drug manufacturers misinformed doctors about the addictiveness and efficacy of opioids. Defendants named in the lawsuit include Purdue Pharma; Teva Ltd.; Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc. (a wholly-owned subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson); Endo Health Solutions Inc.; Allergan PLC; and Mallinckrodt.

The lawsuit also names the nation's largest drug distributors – Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen and McKesson Corp. – which allegedly failed to monitor, identify and report suspicious opioid shipments to pharmacies, in violation of the federal Controlled Substances Act; as well as other large national distributors and retailers.

From 2008 to 2016, 87 El Dorado County and 93 Placer County residents died from opioid-associated overdose.

In El Dorado County, more than 183,000 opiate prescriptions were written in 2016 in a county with a population of approximately 184,000. The county had nine deaths attributable to opioid overdose, which is higher than the state average of

4.6 deaths per 100,000 residents.

In 2016 an estimated 5.1 percent of the population aged 12 and older or 9,000 people, in the county misused opioids and approximately 1,600 had an opioid use disorder. In 2016, the county had a rate of 8.9 emergency department visits per 100,000 people due to opioid overdoses and 13.3 opioid overdose hospitalizations per 100,000 residents.

In 2016, in Placer County 14 people died from opiates. That year the rates of hospitalizations and emergency department visits due to opioids were higher than the statewide average.