



Utility Advisory

TO: AWWA Member Utilities

FROM: AWWA Public Affairs

DATE: September 8, 2011

What: Report on Pharmaceuticals in Drinking Water

Who: Government Accountability Office (GAO)

When: Report Released TODAY

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released a new [report](#) on the presence of pharmaceuticals in drinking water supplies. GAO has concluded that there is limited data on the health effects of low-dose, long-term exposure to pharmaceuticals, and the office recommended that the USEPA better coordinate with other government agencies to collect more occurrence and health data. USEPA agreed with this recommendation.

Pharmaceuticals are currently considered an emerging contaminant, and to-date EPA has not set drinking water standards for any pharmaceuticals under the Safe Drinking Water Act. As detection methods have improved, trace amounts of pharmaceuticals have been found in both source water and treated drinking water. However, the report notes that the pharmaceuticals are mostly detected in the parts per trillion range. Thus far, research has not demonstrated that exposure to such small amounts of pharmaceuticals have any adverse effects on human health.

This report may receive some media coverage, especially in communities where this issue has been raised in the past. Below is a list of suggested talking points for utilities regarding pharmaceutical compounds and personal care products.

Suggested Talking Points for Utilities Regarding Pharmaceutical Compounds

- The water community is committed to protecting public health. Water professionals are researching the occurrence of personal care products and pharmaceutical compounds in drinking water supplies and are paying close attention to health effects research in this area.
- Water professionals have the technology today to detect more substances – at lower levels – than ever before. As analytical methods improve, pharmaceutical compounds and personal care products are being found at very low levels in many of our nation's

lakes, rivers and streams.

- The fact that a substance is detectable does not mean the substance is harmful to humans. To date, research throughout the world has not demonstrated an impact on human health from pharmaceuticals and endocrine disrupting compounds in drinking water.
- While these compounds may be detected at very low levels in source waters, people regularly consume or expose themselves to products containing these compounds in much higher concentrations through medicines, food and beverage and other sources. The level in which they are found in source waters is very small in comparison.
- The ongoing conversation about pharmaceutical compounds should remind us of how precious our source waters are and the need to protect them. As a society, we should encourage policies that protect source water from contaminants introduced by pesticides, gasoline or industrial products. The best and most cost-effective way to ensure safe water at the tap is to keep our source waters clean.
- We encourage our customers to contact [appropriate public health agency] to learn about the proper disposal of prescription medication and other items we use in our daily lives.

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