

Contact: Dave Loveday
Water Quality Association
International Headquarters & Laboratory
4151 Naperville Road, Lisle, Illinois 60532-3696 USA
E-mail: media@wqa.org
Telephone: 630 505 0160 Fax: 630 505 9637



Press release

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With new report showing millions more affected, consumers can find answers about pharmaceuticals in water

One in six Americans may face issue, AP reveals

Lisle, Illinois -- Following a new Associated Press report that shows at least 46 million Americans may have pharmaceuticals in their water, the Water Quality Association is encouraging consumers to educate themselves on possible solutions.

According to a September 10 AP report, almost one in six Americans may be affected by pharmaceuticals in their household water. Since an initial AP report in March, positive tests were reported in 17 areas, including Reno, NV; Savannah, GA; Colorado Springs, CO; and Huntsville, AL. Results are pending in three other areas.

WQA, a not-for-profit alliance of water treatment companies, has become a resource for consumers and public policy makers seeking information about the issue. WQA offers an online fact sheet with answers to the issue of pharmaceuticals in water, available at wqa.org. WQA has also joined a task force to develop independent testing standards that will be able to tell consumers what devices are successful at removing many of these newly discovered contaminants.

Filtering systems in the home provide the highest technology available for treatment of drinking water, according to Joseph Harrison, technical director of WQA. Less than two percent of all water consumed is ingested by humans, making these "point-of-use" systems the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

While utilities are required to meet safety standards set by the U.S. EPA, home filtering systems act as a final contaminant barrier and can further purify water for drinking, Harrison said. While specific product performance standards have not yet been developed for pharmaceuticals, many point-of-use technologies have proven effective for some of these emerging contaminants.

— more —

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The most recent test results, added to data disclosed by communities and water utilities for the March AP report, produce the new total of Americans known to be exposed to drinking water that contains trace levels of pharmaceutical compounds.

Boston, Phoenix and Seattle found no detections of pharmaceuticals in their drinking water supplies, according to AP. Cities that reported finding pharmaceuticals in their supplies detected substances similar to those found in other cities' supplies and reported on in March. One such substance is the anti-convulsant carbamazepine.

According to AP, the overwhelming majority of US cities have not tested drinking water for pharmaceuticals. One of them, New York City, maintains that testing "is not warranted at this time."

WQA has been called on to provide information about the issue in several states. Just last week, Harrison testified before the Illinois State Senate subcommittee on Public Health about the problem.

Independent surveying conducted for WQA has shown a high level of consumer concern. In March, after initial AP reports, a scientific survey conducted for WQA found that 45 percent of respondents feel very concerned and 23 percent somewhat concerned about pharmaceuticals in their water. More than 80 percent were aware of news reports on the issue.

However, the AP reported in May that municipalities rarely inform their residents when pharmaceuticals are found in drinking water.

The Water Quality Association is a non-profit international trade association representing the residential, commercial, industrial and small community water treatment industry. Its membership consists of both manufacturers as well as dealers/distributors of equipment. WQA is a resource and information source, a voice for the industry, an educator of professionals, a laboratory for product testing, and a communicator with the public. WQA has more than 2,500 members nationwide.