



Massachusetts Water Works Association, Inc.

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The Massachusetts Water Works Association, Inc. (MWWA) is a membership organization dedicated to the advancement of the drinking water profession. Through education and advocacy, MWWA is committed to protecting public health and providing a safe and sufficient supply of drinking water to Massachusetts consumers. Public water suppliers and drinking water professionals across the Commonwealth recognize and are concerned about the presence of some very low levels of pharmaceuticals, endocrine disrupting compounds (EDC) and personal care products (PCP) in drinking water that have been found in some areas of the country. MWWA believes the public awareness raised by reports of these compounds in drinking water has been beneficial. It is important to note that as we continue to develop better methods for detection, we will be able to identify more compounds at lower levels. The low level presence of a compound does not necessarily mean that it presents a public health risk. While these compounds may be detected at very low levels in water, people regularly consume or expose themselves to products containing these compounds in much higher concentrations through medicines, food and beverage and other sources. To date there has been no definitive correlation between the presence of low level concentrations of these compounds in water and adverse health effects.

The ongoing attention to these substances should remind all of us of how precious and vulnerable our source waters are and the need to protect them. While MWWA and its members are concerned about this issue we do not believe it warrants a hasty and reactionary response. Rather, we suggest the following:

- ◆ Addressing this issue must necessarily begin with valid scientific research. That research should begin with an assessment of the public health implications of ingesting very low levels of these contaminants or combinations of these contaminants. Until there is a basic understanding of whether a health risk even exists there is no sense in considering extensive testing of public water systems. Any health risk evaluation should be done through an open, public process and include as many qualified experts as are needed to make a defensible and valid assessment. Because of the high level of media attention to this subject it is imperative that any health impact decisions meet rigorous scientific scrutiny and not be influenced by public perception or political pressure.
- ◆ More research is also needed into treatment technology upgrades that wastewater systems and drinking water utilities might use to remove these contaminants from waste streams and if necessary drinking water supplies. If health effects research concludes that very low levels of some of these contaminants do pose a threat then the treatment research will provide a potential solution to affected water and wastewater systems.
- ◆ While there currently are no federal drinking water standards pertaining to pharmaceutical compounds and EDCs in water, the issue is being

researched. Federal drinking water standards for public water systems are established only after peer-reviewed science and data support an intensive technological evaluation. That evaluation focuses on occurrence of the substances in the environment; human exposure and risks of adverse health effects in the general population and sensitive subpopulations; analytical methods of detection; technical feasibility; and impacts of regulation on water systems, the economy and public health. MWWA supports this approach to addressing these issues but stresses that the health impact assessment must take precedence. Requiring water systems to monitor for these contaminants without first establishing an acceptable concentration does not help inform the consumer or lead to sound decision making.

- ◆ The Commonwealth should be pursuing funds to contribute towards the necessary research on the possible health effects of these compounds and other contaminants.

The media attention is a critical reminder that everyone should take steps in minimizing the introduction of pharmaceuticals and other contaminants into the environment.

- ◆ Many pharmacies now have pharmaceutical programs to properly dispose of unwanted or expired medicines. Educational outreach to consumers, nursing homes and medical facilities should also be encouraged as a means of source control. Consumers should contact their city or town for information on municipal hazardous waste disposal programs.
- ◆ The Commonwealth should also revisit its 2004 Water Policy, particularly the “Keep Water Local” component to make certain that current and future water supplies are protected from contamination introduced via recharge of treated wastewater.

If you have any questions related to MWWA’s position please contact: Jennifer Pederson, Executive Director via email to mwwa@verizon.net or at 978-263-1388.