



**American Water Works  
Association**

## **Utility Member Benefit**

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The Authoritative Resource on Safe Water®

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## **Public Affairs Advisory**

**TO: AWWA Leadership  
All Utilities**

**FROM: AWWA Public Affairs**

**DATE: September 11, 2008**

<b>Who:</b>	<b>Associated Press</b>
<b>What:</b>	<b>Forthcoming story regarding additional cities who have found trace amounts of pharmaceuticals in water supply</b>
<b>When:</b>	<b>Imminent</b>

AWWA has been made aware of a story from the Associated Press discussing additional cities who have found the presence of pharmaceuticals in their water supply, and highlighting the fact that many cities have not yet tested their supply for the presence of pharmaceuticals. Specific cities mentioned in the article include Reno, Savannah, Colorado Springs, Huntsville, Boston, Seattle, New York, and Phoenix.

The story was made available on the national wire this afternoon and will likely be picked up by local newspapers and television and radio media. Utilities should be prepared to talk about the issue of pharmaceuticals in water and to bring an informed voice to this continued conversation.

To help you prepare to address the issue, AWWA is providing the talking points and some general risk communications tips below.

A link to AWWA's consumer information on pharmaceuticals in drinking water can be found from the front page of [www.drinktap.org](http://www.drinktap.org) or [www.drinktap.org/consumerdnn/Home/WaterInformation/WaterQuality/PharmaceuticalsPPCPs/tabid/73/Default.aspx](http://www.drinktap.org/consumerdnn/Home/WaterInformation/WaterQuality/PharmaceuticalsPPCPs/tabid/73/Default.aspx). The site includes video of CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding commenting specifically on this topic.

In addition, we recommend utilities consider contacting reporters with whom they have good working relationships in advance of publication to prevent misunderstandings that may result from the story.

AWWA's Public Affairs Office is also available to assist with questions or to serve as third-party sources. Please contact us at 303-347-6140 or 303-734-3410.

### **Risk Communications Tips for AP Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products story**

1. **Be proactive.**  
An Associated Press story of this magnitude is likely to generate a great deal of interest from local media. Utilities, especially those who have been contacted by AP or have good working relationships with reporters, may wish to contact their local media in advance to ensure their side of the story is told.
2. **Meet the needs of the media.**  
In most cases, the media serves as the first conduit of information to customers. Return media phone calls and emails as soon as possible to ensure that your messages are part of any story. Draw attention to any information prepared to help frame the issue in the proper context.
3. **Be prepared.**  
Have information prepared in advance so that it can be quickly disseminated to external audiences – customers, media, and lawmakers – as requested. Similarly, make sure that those on the front lines are prepared to respond to questions they receive.
4. **Listen to the public's specific concerns.**  
People want to be heard and often care more about trust, credibility, competence, fairness, and empathy than about statistics and details. Listen to customers and respond with frank, honest responses.
5. **Speak clearly and with compassion.**  
While pharmaceuticals and personal care products may not be a public health concern in your community, take care to acknowledge all concerns as genuine, and respond with patience and compassion.
6. **Embrace the public as a partner.**  
Unwarranted angst can be reduced by demonstrating transparency and good will.
7. **Utilize credible third-parties to amplify your message.**  
Work in advance to identify local or state public health officials who can speak to this issue. Having objective third-party voices can put the issue in context and bring customers an added level of comfort.

## **Suggested Utility Talking Points on Pharmaceutical Compounds and Personal Care Products**

- 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 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maintains an active program called the Contaminant Candidate List (CCL) to identify contaminants in public drinking water that warrant detailed study. The CCL does not currently include any personal care products or pharmaceuticals.
- While research has not demonstrated human health impacts from these compounds, the ongoing conversation should remind us of how precious our source waters are and the need to protect them from harmful substances. 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.
- The federal Office of National Drug Control Policy recommends not flushing prescription drugs down the toilet unless the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so.
- For more information on this and other water quality issues, contact [local water utility] or the American Water Works Association Office of Public Affairs at 303-734-3410.

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