



**American Water Works  
Association**

## **Utility Member Benefit**

**Government Affairs Office**  
1300 Eye Street NW  
Suite 701W  
Washington, DC 20005  
T 202.628.8303  
F 202.628.2846

**Headquarters**  
6666 West Quincy Avenue  
Denver, CO 80235-3098  
Washington, DC 20005  
T 303.794.7711  
F 303.795.1989  
[www.awwa.org](http://www.awwa.org)

The Authoritative Resource on Safe Water®

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## **Public Affairs Advisory**

**TO: AWWA Leadership  
All Utilities**

**FROM: AWWA Public Affairs**

**DATE: September 15, 2008**

<b>Who:</b>	<b>Associated Press</b>
<b>What:</b>	<b>Investigative Article Concerning Hospital Disposal of Pharmaceuticals into Wastewater Supplies</b>
<b>When:</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>

This past weekend, the Associated Press (AP) distributed an article to media outlets concerning the disposal of pharmaceuticals by hospitals. This is a continuation of AP's ongoing reporting on the broader presence of pharmaceuticals in water supplies. It is possible that the story will be picked up by newspapers and television and radio stations over the coming days, and utilities may get inquiries from their local media. The report can be found at:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/14/AR2008091401014.html>

In addition to providing their own information related to pharmaceuticals, utilities are invited to link to AWWA's [drinktap.org](http://www.drinktap.org) site. This page includes video of CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding commenting on this topic.

<http://www.drinktap.org/consumerdnn/Default.aspx?tabid=73>

Utilities may also find the attached talking points useful in responding to media inquiries.

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.

## **AWWA Talking Points on Pharmaceutical Compounds and Personal Care Products**

### ***Background on the Issue of Pharmaceuticals and Drinking Water***

- Recent news coverage related to the occurrence of trace amounts of pharmaceuticals and personal care products in drinking water has elevated this issue in the minds of many legislators and consumers.
- Water professionals, toxicologists and public health experts have been researching the occurrence of personal care products and pharmaceutical compounds in the environment for many years.

### ***What has Changed is Detection Technology***

- 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 and even drinking water.
- 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.

### ***Reducing Inappropriate Disposal of 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.
  - The best and most cost-effective way to ensure safe water at the tap is to keep our source waters clean.
  - A growing number of communities are implementing pharmaceutical take-back programs as a way to limit unwanted compounds that end up in our wastewater systems. 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.
- While it's a smart step to encourage responsible disposal of unused medications, preventing the flushing of these items will not eliminate the occurrence of these compounds in the wastewater system. People and animals do not completely absorb the medicines they take, and some concentrations of these of compounds pass through digestive systems and end up in wastewater.