

Board of Water Commissioners

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“Providing and Protecting Kenosha’s Greatest Natural Resource”

Pharmaceutical Compounds in Drinking Water

The Kenosha Water Utility is committed to protecting public health. Kenosha’s state-of-the-art microfiltration water plant provides the highest quality water available.

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.

Jill Jonas, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Director of the Bureau of Drinking Water and Ground Water, said, “There isn’t enough information out there to know whether testing should be required. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t continue to look at it. It is an emerging issue, and the more we can learn about it, the better.”

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 the American Water Works Association Office of Public Affairs at 303-734-3410.