

OurwaterQuality

About pharmaceuticals in water

As one of five participating entities in the recent, free, well-testing program conducted by the New Mexico Environment Department, we were privy to some interesting inquiries about the testing protocol. The objectives of the program are to improve our knowledge of local groundwater chemistry and ultimately to be able to map the distribution of natural and manmade contaminants in the local aquifers.

One of the most unusual questions posed to me was whether or not we would be testing for pharmaceuticals. The answer is “No.” In early, 2008, the Associated Press released the results of a five-month study revealing trace amounts of pharmaceuticals in public drinking-water systems. Albuquerque was one of the few major cities where test results were negative, and Santa Fe water was not tested. The AP report was a reiteration of facts that have been known for decades, but detection by modern analytical methods of very minor levels of pharmaceuticals, coupled with an increase in prescription drug usage, caused a resurgence of interest

in the subject.

PPCPs (pharmaceuticals and personal-care products) are classed as bioactive chemicals because they have an effect on living tissue. PPCPs include prescription, over-the-counter, and veterinary drugs; and fragrances, cosmetics, sunscreen agents, nutraceuticals, biopharmaceuticals, and growth-enhancing chemicals used in agribusiness.

Pharmaceuticals enter wastewater streams because medications are only partially absorbed by the body and the residues are excreted. Another contributing action is when people flush unused medications down toilets and they enter wastewater treatment plants and eventually flow to our streams and rivers. There are no federal or state regulations for the discharge of PPCPs from wastewater treatment plants. Just last month, the river conservation group Amigos Bravos reported evidence of traces (parts per trillion) of drugs in irrigation ditches off the Rio Grande in Bernalillo County. There are no definitive studies showing long-term human health effects

from pharmaceuticals at the levels being detected.

Concerns have been raised about the possible entry of PPCPs from the Rio Grande at the Buckman Direct Diversion Project. Potential issues are discussed in the independent consultant’s report on contaminant removal. City water, by statute, will comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act, which does not govern PPCPs. There are also no maximum contamination levels for pharmaceuticals under New Mexico’s Drinking Water Regulations.

Private, domestic well-owners are on their own to monitor their water quality. There are some useful indirect markers. Nitrate, which is commonly an indicator of septic intrusion into a well-water supply, is a possible indicator of a pathway for other contaminants (such as PPCPs). The EPA recommends testing annually for nitrate.

Excellent sources for learning more about PPCPs include the websites of the EPA, the National Sanitation Foundation International, and the Water Quality Association. In a recent article in the



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Journal of the American Water Works Association, the authors noted that, in addition to its myriad other capabilities, reverse osmosis removes more than 90 percent of steroids, antibiotics, antidepressants, anti-inflammatory drugs, and antimicrobials.

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FromtheDirector

Law increases time of eviction notice

Health-care reform will be the hot topic over the summer as Congress will begin to consider a variety of proposals and legislation after many months of behind-the-scenes talks. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) has worked with key lawmakers who are crafting legislation to ensure that comprehensive health-care reform addresses the needs of the self-employed and small employers. Realtors have also urged Congress to reintroduce the Small Business Health Options Plan Act and Health Care Choice Act.

Presently, one in four Realtors lacks health insurance. While all small businesses have found it difficult to find affordable health insurance, Realtors have been even more challenged. Typically, Realtors are self-employed, independent contractors. In most states, the self-employed desiring coverage have to turn to the state’s individual insurance market, in which applicants can be turned down for medical reasons with no leverage to garner lower premiums.

In anticipation of the health reform movement, NAR conducted a member survey in 2008. Approximately half (51 percent) of Realtors responding believed that the health care system is not meeting their needs or the needs of their families. Over 90 percent said the U.S. health care system should be reformed. Among Realtors with health insurance coverage, 43 percent purchased an individual market private plan while 27 percent were covered under a spouse’s or partner’s insurance plan. Realtors without coverage reported that premium cost was the main reason (73 percent) for lack of coverage and 15 percent cited a pre-existing condition as reason for a high premium.

Unforeseen health care costs have led to the loss of a home for some families. The **Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009**, which went into effect on May 20, may provide modest relief by requiring landlords to provide tenants with 90 days notice prior to being evicted, when their rental home is foreclosed upon. Tenants

must be allowed to stay in the property through the end of their lease, with two exceptions:

- The new owner wants to occupy the property as a personal residence, or
- There is no lease, or there is a lease but state law allows the lease to be terminated at any time upon notice.

Even under these exceptions, the tenants must be given 90 days’ notice. Notification must be provided by the “immediate successor in interest.” In some cases, this notification will come from the bank (when they assume the home), and in other cases it may be the new owner.

A number of states have existing laws protecting tenants. Current New Mexico law requires a 30-day notice. The Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 will preempt existing state law, except where the state law offers greater protection. The protections of this law apply only to “bona fide” tenants - who have a written contract, where the lease was the result of an arms-



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length transaction, and the rent is not substantially less than the fair market rent for the property. Under any conditions, tenants may still be evicted if they violate their lease terms. The provisions are scheduled to expire on Dec. 31, 2012.

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