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FACT SHEET: Pharmaceuticals in water

ANSWERS TO YOUR TOP QUESTIONS -- UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2008

Home filtering systems provide best protection for drinking water

As news reports about pharmaceuticals in water circulate, here are several facts for consumers to consider:

- Filtering systems in the home provide the highest technology available for treatment of drinking water. Less than **two percent** of all water consumed is ingested by humans, making these “point-of-use” systems the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly.
- While utilities are required to meet safety standards set by the U.S. EPA, home filtering systems act as a **final contaminant barrier** and can further purify water for drinking.
- While specific product performance standards have not yet been developed for pharmaceuticals, many point-of-use technologies have proven effective for some of these emerging contaminants. **Nano-filtration and reverse osmosis systems** removed drugs tested by the Colorado School of Mines at full-scale facilities in Arizona and California. Activated carbon, distillation, ozonation, and advanced oxidization have likewise shown promise in removing many of these contaminants. Individual manufacturers can also test products for specific pharmaceuticals if they choose.
- According to Utah State University Extension, up to **90 percent** of oral drugs can pass through humans unchanged. These often then move through wastewater into streams and groundwater. It is generally cost prohibitive for utilities to use systems such as nano-filtration, long contact activated carbon, and reverse osmosis. However, these technologies have proven successful at removing many contaminants in home water treatment systems.
- In addition to pharmaceuticals, water quality experts are examining other emerging contaminants, such as those found in personal care products and pesticides. These are often referred to as endocrine disrupting chemicals. Home filtering systems have also been proven to treat threats such as lead and mercury.
- WQA provides **Gold Seal certification** for products that remove a variety of contaminants.
- Consumers can learn about different treatment systems and find locally certified dealers by visiting the WQA Web site’s Gold Seal and **Find A Professional** features.
- More information is available at WQA’s **Water Information Library** online, which includes a search feature.

WQA is a non-profit association that provides public information about water treatment issues and also trains and certifies professionals to better serve consumers. WQA has more than 2,500 members nationwide.