

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Laura Orlando, (v) 617-524-7258, (mobile) 617-413-8505,
Email: lorlando@bu.edu

Sixty-eight public interest groups applaud Senator Boxer's investigation and hearings on toxics in drinking water and sewage sludge poisoning our food

Pharmaceuticals and toxics in drinking water inextricably associated with sewers and sewage treatment

WASHINGTON— On April 15th the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, chaired by Senator Barbara Boxer, will be holding hearings on recent studies documenting pharmaceuticals found in drinking water around the United States.

A few weeks later, in May, Senator Boxer's Committee will be holding hearings on the land application of sewage sludge and the massive use of sewage sludge as a fertilizer to grow food distributed throughout the U.S. (USDA prohibits growing organic food on sewage sludge.)

Sixty-eight environmental, farm, and food safety organizations applaud the leadership of Senator Boxer holding long overdue hearings on these issues so vital to protecting the health of all Americans.

Discharges from wastewater treatment plants -- no matter what level of treatment -- are polluting our drinking water and, through the land application of sewage sludge, poisoning our food.

In October 2003, 73 organizations working to protect the nation's food supply petitioned the EPA to stop the unsafe practice of land application of sewage sludge.

<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/pubs/FinalPetitionSludge.pdf>.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 2003, EPA denied the Petition.

In February of this year, a federal judge ruled among other things that the basis for EPA's denial of the Petition was based on misleading and false testing data and science. See "Sewage-Based Fertilizer Safety Doubted," Associated Press (AP), March 6, 2008, <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/03/07/7533/>

Pharmaceuticals in water are inextricably linked to sewage treatment effluent and sewage sludge. "Probe Finds Drugs in Drinking Water," AP, March 9, 2008, <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory?id=4416882>

Attached is more information about the effects of pharmaceuticals being discharged by wastewater treatment plants into the environment.

Pharmaceuticals are finding their way into the nation's water and food supply through sewage treatment effluent and sewage sludge from the over 16,000 publicly owned treatment works in the United States. Approximately 7 million dry tons of sewage sludge are put on U.S. soil each year.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) found that sewage sludge contains high concentrations (hundreds of milligrams per kilogram) of pharmaceuticals and personal care products.

<http://toxics.usgs.gov/highlights/biosolids.html>

The USGS scientists found:

Fifty-five of the 87 organic chemicals measured were detected in at least one of the nine sewage sludge (“biosolids”) samples collected, with as many as 45 chemicals found in a single sample. Some of the pharmaceuticals found include: carbamazepine, an antiepileptic drug; 3-beta-coprostanol, a steroid; and fluoxetine (Prozac), an antidepressant drug. http://toxics.usgs.gov/highlights/compounds_biosolids_study.html

Twenty-five of the chemicals were present in every sludge sample including compounds that are pharmaceutically and hormonally active, such as an antimicrobial disinfectant (triclosan), a musk fragrance (tonalide), an antihistamine (diphenhydramine), and an antiepileptic drug (carbamazepine).

USGS has also found pharmaceuticals downstream of wastewater treatment plant discharges. Of the 103 emerging contaminants investigated, 78 were found in at least one sample.

http://toxics.usgs.gov/regional/emc/wastewater_treatment.html

The San Francisco Bay, for example, receives over 830 million gallons per day of sewage plant effluent, all of it containing pharmaceuticals and other toxins.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/05/11/BAGI1IPJMO1.DTL>

Because pharmaceuticals are designed to have a biological effect and can be hormonally active, even when present at low concentrations in water, they are harmful to living organisms. Scientists have found sexual abnormalities in frogs, fish, and other animals exposed to sewage effluent from wastewater treatment plants.

Ocean currents are carrying sewage outfall toxins to surf zones and shorelines. The ocean floor near sewage outfalls is contaminated with estrogenic compounds, including those from pharmaceuticals, that are feminizing fish and affecting organisms at all stages of life.

For example, eleven male bottom-dwelling fish out of 64 caught in the ocean off Southern California had ovary tissue in their testes. Two-thirds of male turbot and sole caught near Orange County's sewage outfall had egg-producing proteins.

Mary Buzby, director of environmental technology for drug maker Merck & Co. Inc., said: "There's no doubt about it, pharmaceuticals are being detected in the environment and there is genuine concern that these compounds, in the small concentrations that they're at, could be causing impacts to human health or to aquatic organisms." <http://www.texarkanagazette.com/news/WireHeadlines/2008/03/10/pharmaceuticals-found-in-tap-water-19.php>

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