

**House Leaves Major EPA Pharmaceutical Study for Next Congress  
October 6, 2008  
Inside EPA Environmental News Stand**

House efforts to require EPA to study the health effects and treatment options for pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) in water will likely have to wait for consideration in the next Congress after lawmakers all but decided they will not return for a lame-duck session this year.

The bill, H.R. 6820, introduced by Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), sets deadlines for EPA to issue a series of reports identifying what PPCPs -- including human and livestock products -- are in the nation's waters, their health effects and how to address them. McCarthy and other supporters say the studies are necessary to determine whether the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act are adequate to protect waters from the emerging contaminants.

Under the legislation, EPA is required to craft an initial report, required one year after enactment, identifying PPCPs found in waters, their sources, and the methods for monitoring them. An interim report -- required three years after enactment -- requires EPA to identify health and environmental effects of PPCPs, methods and techniques for safe disposal of unused PPCPs, and methods to remove PPCPs from waters and improve treatment of water discharges.

A final report, required five years after enactment, requires EPA to identify a wide range of effects from long-term exposure to PPCPs.

However, the bill is drawing opposition from EPA water chief Ben Grumbles, who says the agency is already taking numerous steps to address the issue. "EPA will continue in evaluating effects, occurrence, and risk reduction strategies so we can make sound decisions to protect public health and aquatic life. By engaging the full range of public and private partners and by using appropriate regulatory and incentive-based tools, we will ensure continued progress in meeting the goals of the Clean Water Act," he said in his written testimony.

Industry critics are also arguing that concern about exposure to the contaminants is overblown and some lawmakers say they oppose new budget mandates when the government is so far in debt.

McCarthy sought to attach a similar version of the legislation as an amendment to the Beach Protection Act, which the House passed earlier this year, but withdrew the amendment. McCarthy's withdrawn amendment would have required EPA to conduct a two-year study, rather than the current five years.

Key leaders of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on the bill Sept. 18, indicating they plan to continue to focus on the issue in the months ahead. "I look forward to a continuing dialogue on whether a 'next generation' of the Clean Water Act is necessary to meet the water quality challenges of the upcoming century," committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) said in a statement.

And McCarthy said she also plans to work to win broader agreement on the measure, including agreement among EPA, water treatment companies, drug companies, agricultural interests and others.

Proponents were considering efforts to pass the bill during a lame-duck session after the November election, but said that if they could not, they would make a concerted effort at passage next Congress. One environmentalist says the bill could pass "by veto-proof majorities" given concerns about the safety of drinking water supplies coming from big city mayors and governors.

However, critics of the measure raised major concerns. One industry source says the bill assumes significantly greater risks from the chemicals than the sponsors believe. "You would have to drink two olympic swimming pools of water daily to ingest a single therapeutic dose of [the pharmaceuticals in the water]," one industry source says.

The industry source also rejected a proposal floated by Dr. Peter deFur, a professor at the Center for Environmental Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, to require annual monitoring of all chemicals discharged from wastewater treatment plants. Doing so would be “prohibitively, ridiculously expensive,” the source says.

Rep. Gene Taylor (D-MS) also raised concerns about the cost of any new study requirements. “As a representative of 700,000 people, I’ve got to explain to my constituents why the federal government is \$10 trillion in debt. Perhaps you can point out a specific problem [the bill is intended to address] and what the specific solution is,” he told the bill’s supporters.

One scientist involved in the issue also questioned whether it’s feasible for EPA to complete the studies within five years, but notes that, “as a legislator, if you don’t stress the system, nothing will get done.”

Another scientist, though, says the timeline is feasible, but not given the resources EPA has currently directed to studying PPCPs.