

US Senate begins drugs-in-water hearing

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

WASHINGTON — The US Senate was scheduled on April 15 to begin a hearing to look into reports that trace levels of prescription drugs are present in US public drinking water supplies, according to an April 15 [Marketplace](#) report.

The hearing, called by Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg, D-NJ, and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, will examine the problem of pharmaceuticals in drinking water supplies, and provide a national framework for tackling the problem, as [WaterTech Online™](#) reported.

Issues of public disclosure and the absence so far of federal regulation on the pharmaceutical issue are expected to be the focuses of the hearing before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, according to an April 14 [Associated Press](#) report.

Officials from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and US Geological Survey were scheduled to testify, as was Jennifer Sass, senior scientist for the New York-headquartered Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental advocacy group.

Sass, who offered elements from her testimony in her NRDC [blog](#), told Marketplace that she disagreed with the pharmaceutical industry's stance that there is no proven risk to human health from trace levels of pharmaceuticals in drinking water. She said those findings are based on individual drug exposures, not the combination of drugs commonly found in many municipal supplies.

AP reported that the hearing "could produce a showdown between committee members and EPA officials." EPA had not responded to committee members' inquiries on the agency's plans to address concerns about pharmaceuticals in drinking water.

Meanwhile, officials in cities across the nation also have called hearings on drugs in their water supplies.

Philadelphia, which was named in the March AP investigative report revealing that drugs were detected in the drinking water supplies of 24 major metropolitan areas, held an April 14 meeting. The city's water commissioner, Bernard Brunwasser, said at the meeting that "infinitesimally small amounts" of pharmaceuticals in Philadelphia's drinking water should not pose a health hazard, but acknowledged that the health effects of the drugs remain largely unknown, [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#) reported.

Brunwasser, who said the city has tested its water supply for 75 drugs, called for a reduction of pharmaceuticals in the water supply, starting with asking residents not to flush unused medicines down the toilet