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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

*WATER & WASTES DIGEST* is published exclusively for the 90,000+ decision makers in the municipal and industrial water, wastewater and water pollution industries. These individuals actively design, specify, buy, operate and maintain the equipment, chemicals and services used for water treatment. Editorial content in this audited publication highlights new products and literature concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. Regular Product Emphasis and High-Tech Focus sections feature major equipment and systems. A product directory is included in the annual June *Buyer's Guide*.

Scranton Gillette Communications' Infrastructure Team



**EDITORIAL**  
letter

# How Little is Too Much?

Gas prices are up, the economy is down, but the price of water and sewer services basically remains free.

There is no substitute for water; it is critical to life. While this is common knowledge, for as long as water continues to flow out of taps for less than a penny per gallon, we will look the other way and continue to abuse water resources. In the meantime, drought, water shortages and crumbling infrastructure loom, and day-by-day water becomes a valuable scarce resource.

How often do we see public officials readily accept proposals for increases of water and sewer rates? The answer is not often. In fact, utilities have to hold public meetings and educate the local population about the necessity of plant and infrastructure upgrades in order to get the public on board with a rate increase.

Unfortunately, plant and infrastructure upgrades are the type of problems that have too long remained out-of-sight, out-of-mind for the general public. Yet, recent studies and media reports about pharmaceuticals and other personal care products entering surface and groundwater have become a growing concern.

Many sought-after drugs that help sustain human health such as antibiotics, cancer treatment, painkillers, cholesterol medication—even birth control—are now being detected in various water resources.

This is no news to water treatment professionals. It is not just the practice of flushing old medications down the toilet. People take pills and their bodies absorb only some of the medication. The rest passes through and finds its way to the wastewater plant. Although wastewater is treated before being discharged back into the environment and then treated again at the water treatment plant before entering the distribution system, some drug traces remain.

Current studies show that drug-contaminated effluent mostly poses risk for aquatic life. Drinking water supplies only show pharmaceuticals in parts per million and parts per trillion concentrations—far below currently known health risk levels. Scientists, however, speculate that there could be potential long-term effects.

Although utilities may find themselves under a lot of pressure to respond to public inquiries, they must be part of the solution and remain current on advances in water treatment technologies.

After all, it is because of the advancements in testing technology that scientists are able to detect contaminants in such low concentrations today. Additional research is needed to determine exactly how large of an impact these new contaminants will have on humans. Currently, no one knows how little is too much.



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