



### What's in the Water? It All Boils Down to Public Education

During the past century fantastic strides in medical research have been made. Through the development of vaccinations many diseases have been conquered. It is remarkable when you think that we've been able to witness an organization like the March of Dimes change their mission and focus due to the eradication of polio.

We are fortunate to live in this day and age and have medicines available

to us that in the nineteenth century were unheard of. These medicines do miraculous things, and serve important purposes. However, we are witnessing the evolution of the pharmaceutical industry. Television and magazine advertising that even 10 years ago rarely displayed anything more than over-the-counter cold and headache remedies, now fills our eyes and ears with promotions touting why you need to take a specific prescription and then in smaller type, listing a long line of precautions. But, overprescribing, overuse and the over-commercialization of drugs could be causing some unintended consequences, for as we know, what we ingest ends up at a wastewater utility and, ultimately, in some form or other in the environment.

We also know that it is not just the pharmaceuticals that are ingested in humans that end up in the environment. Drugs get into the environment from the plants where they are manufactured, medical facilities (hospitals and nursing homes) and from veterinary processes. Growing up as the daughter of a pharmacist, every couple of years I would witness my dad dumping in the toilet expired pills from the medicine cabinet. The pills were flushed in our home, as I suspect in many homes around the globe. It was an interesting event to witness – the swirling colorful pills in the water, circling around until they disappeared. I believe my father labeled the act as “routine maintenance” to keep the medicines in the cabinet current and effective for when they were needed. In the early 70s when this took place, I don't think it ever occurred to him that this action could have an effect on water quality.

Today we know better, and are slowly making progress. We now have take-back programs starting in several municipalities and, in time, every household will know the right thing to do with old and unused medicines, just as we recycle paper, plastic and glass and bring our batteries and household hazardous waste to recovery facilities. Until medical recycling becomes a reality, it's up to us to share the message and coordinate a strong public education campaign on how to dispose of unused and expired drugs. To that end, under the leadership of President Robert Kukenberger, the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) will have information on this topic on its website in the coming months. This is another step for the organization to be the “go to” site for environmental information.

A special thanks to Robert Adamski, Sandy Lizlovs and Darcy Sachs for their assistance in the coordination of this issue.

### Year of Sanitation

The United Nations General Assembly declared the year 2008 the *International Year of Sanitation*. Recognizing the significant role that wastewater treatment has played and continues to play in public health should empower all water quality management professionals. This empowerment will last a lifetime, not just one year. It is one more way that NYWEA members and our counterparts around the globe are getting the recognition that is well deserved.

### NYWEA News – Looking Ahead

**Elected Officials Roundtables:** We are once again coordinating the basic and advanced panels on wastewater for local elected representatives. By attending you'll learn more about how to protect and maintain your wastewater treatment plant. You'll understand better the financial and administrative responsibilities associated with running a top-notch utility. Listed here are panels to be held in the following areas of the state. More information on these roundtables can be found on the NYWEA website ([www.nywea.org](http://www.nywea.org)).

\*November 13 – Basic – Town of Chenango

\*December 2-3 – Basic/Advanced – Dunkirk

\*March 26, 2009 – Basic – Potsdam

**Upcoming Themes:** The winter issue of *Clearwaters* will carry the theme, “Wastewater Infrastructure,” and Sandi Allen, director of NYSDEC's Clean and Safe Water Infrastructure Funding Initiative, is helping us to develop comprehensive articles that will be of interest to all members.

Periodically we look at the various geographic regions of the state and cover items of significant importance and the “Chesapeake Bay” is the theme for the spring issue. We welcome input from all members, so if you have an idea for an upcoming theme or technology to be covered, please get in touch with me ([pcr@nywea.org](mailto:pcr@nywea.org)).

**New Mission Statement:** As the result of a strategic planning session held in the spring, NYWEA leaders crafted a refined mission statement, as shown below, from which we can take pride and guidance as our membership moves forward.

**Mission Statement:** NYWEA will serve the best interests of the public by promoting sustainable clean water quality management through science, education and training.

NYWEA will advance the professional well being of our membership, provide opportunities to expand their knowledge and capabilities, and cultivate a forum to enable them to play a vital role in shaping an environmentally sound future.

  
Patricia Cerro-Reehil

