

Milwaukee Water Works

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Milwaukee's Drinking Water is Free of Pharmaceuticals

The most recent tests have found Milwaukee's drinking water to be clear of pharmaceuticals. On March 10, the Associated Press publicized its investigative report about pharmaceuticals and medicines in drinking water. The Milwaukee Water Works had provided its own test results to the AP in December.

Of 62 major water utilities contacted by the AP, 28, including Milwaukee, test for pharmaceuticals. None of the tests are required by law. The Milwaukee Water Works tests Lake Michigan water before treatment and tests its treated drinking water for pharmaceuticals. The AP report also validates Milwaukee's choice of ozone in its treatment process. Ozone is a powerful disinfectant that destroys the molecules of these pharmaceuticals.

The report said many of the utilities that test for pharmaceuticals test only for one or two compounds. In 2007, Milwaukee conducted two rounds of tests each for 73 pharmaceuticals in source water, treated water at its two treatment plants, and treated water leaving the plants. The tests found:

- five pharmaceuticals in Lake Michigan water * (see below)
two in treated water at the treatment plants + (see below)
- None were detected in two points in the distribution system, indicating Milwaukee tap water is free of pharmaceuticals.

The Milwaukee Water Works is beginning its fourth year of testing for pharmaceuticals. While the tests are not required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the utility conducts the voluntary tests as a precaution to ensure safe drinking water and to collect baseline data for study and possible future regulations. Science is evolving and as methods are developed, more compounds are added to the testing every year, said Superintendent Carrie M. Lewis. Pharmaceuticals and personal care products in water have been a concern of water utilities and the American Water Works Association and EPA for some time.

What can consumers do? The best and most cost-effective way to ensure safe water at the tap is to keep our source waters clean. You can help by not flushing unused medications down the toilet or sink. Instead, ask if your pharmacy accepts medications for disposal, and watch for a Medicine Collection Day in your area.

* Caffeine, Carbadox (antibiotic), Cotinine (metabolic byproduct of nicotine), Gemfibrozil (lipid and cholesterol-modifying medication), Oleandomycin (antibiotic).

+ Cotinine (metabolic byproduct of nicotine) and Lincomycin (antibiotic)

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Safe, Abundant Drinking Water.